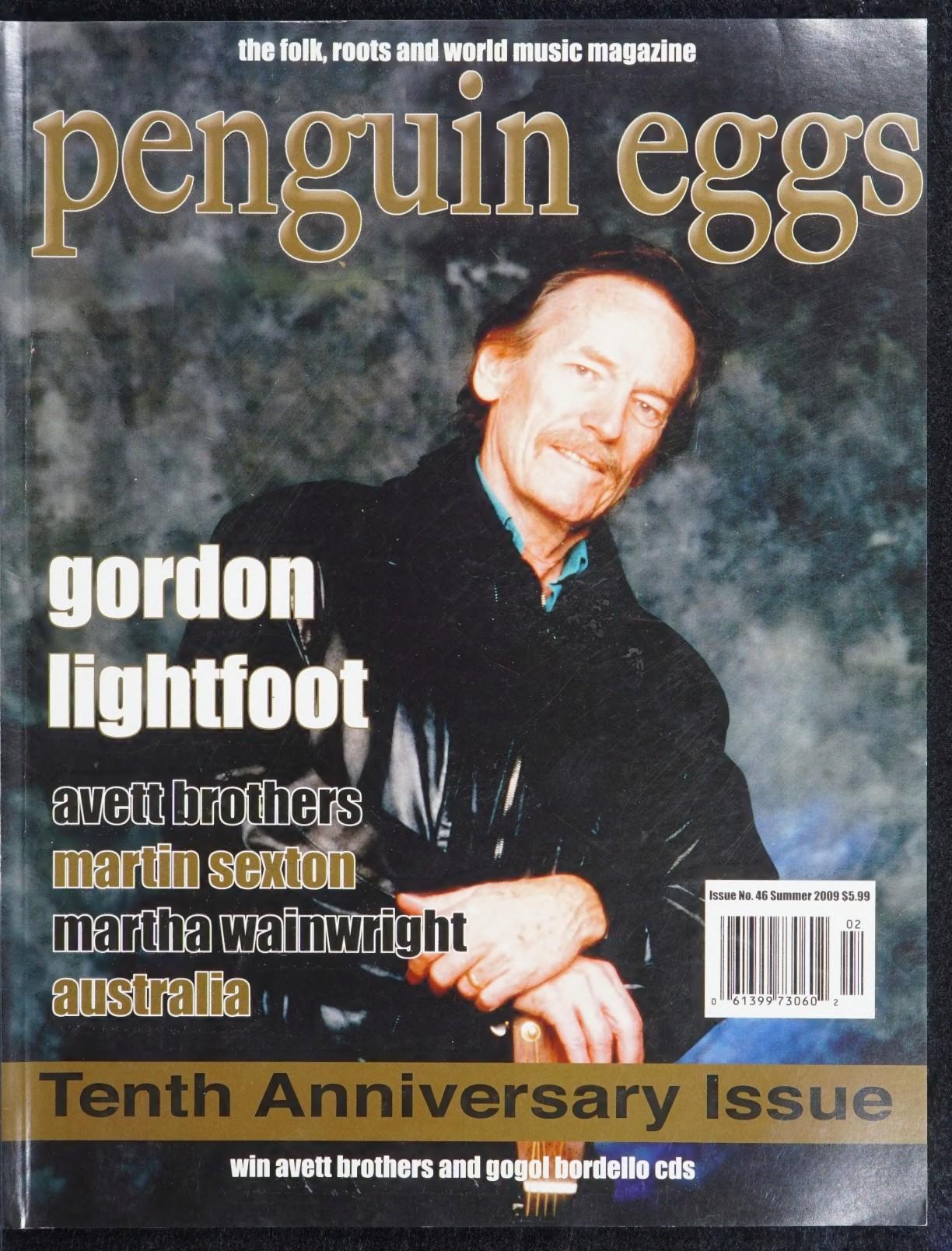


the folk, roots and world music magazine

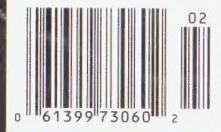
penguin eggs



gordon
lightfoot

avett brothers
martin sexton
martha wainwright
australia

Issue No. 46 Summer 2009 \$5.99



Tenth Anniversary Issue

win avett brothers and gogol bordello cds

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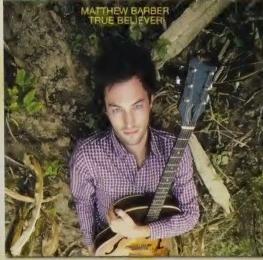
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Canada's Folk, Roots and World Music Magazine

Issue No. 46 Summer, 2010

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This magazine takes its name from Nic Jones's wonderful album Penguin Eggs — a collection of mainly traditional British folk songs revitalized with extraordinary flair and ingenuity. Released in Britain in 1980, it has grown into a source of inspiration for many young, gifted performers.

Nic, sadly, suffered horrific injuries in a car crash in 1982 and has never fully recovered. He now seldom performs. His care and respect shown for the tradition and prudence to recognize the merits of innovation makes Penguin Eggs such an outrageously fine recording. This magazine strives to reiterate that spirit. Nic Jones's Penguin Eggs is available through Topic Records.

Penguin Eggs magazine is published and printed in Canada and acknowledges the generous financial support from the Alberta Foundation for the Arts and the Government of Canada through the Publications Assistance Program and the Canada Magazine Fund toward our mailing, editorial and production costs.



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du Canada

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aA Alberta
Foundation
for the Arts

editorial

Ten years. My, my, my, where did they go? It really seems like yesterday that I spent a harsh winter in Fort McMurray squirreling away every penny in order to publish the first issue in the summer of 2001. Driven by little more than innocent enthusiasm and raw intuition, I never thought for one minute this minority interest music magazine wouldn't inspire curiosity. Blind faith has its advantages. Naivety, too. And, yes, luck played its part.

Consider the timing. At the turn of the millennium, Canada was on the brink of producing an unprecedented assortment of wonderful, new innovative folk talent: David Francey, Harry Manx, Be Good Tanyas, The Duhks, Matapati, La Volée d'Castors . . . the list goes on.

Just as important, as world economies grew in the Nineties and Naughties, international performers toured more. World music gradually made its presence felt here. And Canadian folk audiences developed an unerring, open-minded willingness to expand their tastes. To channel that mass musical fascination into a meaningful magazine readership, now there lay the challenge. That *Penguin Eggs* has survived and prospered is due in part to the vitality and growth of the music it covers. This tenth anniversary is also, in a sense, an affirmation of its content.

As the editor, it is, first and foremost, my job to initiate the kind of features that inspire you, the reader, to explore the music avidly trumpeted in each issue. Not exactly a difficult task. The proof of the pudding, as they say, is in the . . . bathroom — on the scales. I mean, how could you not enjoy Colin Irwin's wonderful, intuitive, animated piece in this issue, about the thrilling acoustic music currently made in the U.K.? Karl Magi's insightful look at the resurgence in Balkan Brass Bands in the U.S. ought to trigger a similar response.

And, truth to tell, Mike Bell called in a few favours to interview the seriously popular Avett Brothers — one of numerous justifiably celebrated young North American acts that draw inspiration from the folk tradition. Think Fleet Foxes, The Decemberists, Arcade Fire, Calexico, Great Lake Swimmers, Gogol Bordello, Joanna Newsom . . . oh, you get the point; folk is cool again.

As exciting as this prospect surely is, for me it's equally important to evoke folks' colourful past through pieces like Mariposa. As Shakespeare asserts in Othello: "To mourn a mischief that is past and gone, Is the next way to draw new mischief on". At age ten, *Penguin Egg* remains full of mischief. Its unflagging commitment to stimulating and nourishing its readers intact. Here's to the next decade.

— Roddy Campbell

cover feature

58 ... Gordon Lightfoot needs little introduction in these pages. The most revered troubadour in the history of contemporary music in Canada has seen his songs covered by everyone from Bob Dylan to Elvis Presley. Larry LeBlanc, the dean of Canadian music journalists, catches up with an old friend.

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quotable

"I wanted to have James Taylor one year and his manager told me that he was getting \$20,000 the next week to play the Hollywood Bowl," I said. "Then he can afford to do Mariposa." So, James Taylor said he'd come for one day for \$78 plus his airfare and hotel."

— Estelle Klein

"After decades when outing yourself as a folk fan was to invite the sort of ridicule only previously reserved for trainspotters and traffic wardens, [folk] has helped create a quiet revolution that's attracted a deluge of young artists and audiences."

— Colin Irwin

sheet music

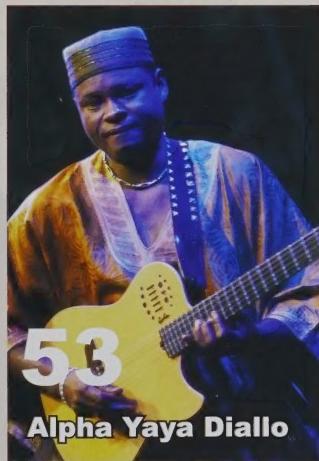
- 102 . . . Songs of The Bush — By Chloe & Jason Roweth

- 101 . . . Two traditional Quebec fiddle tunes:
La Clog de Montagnards and *La Reel Sans Âge* — Arranged by Pascal Gemme



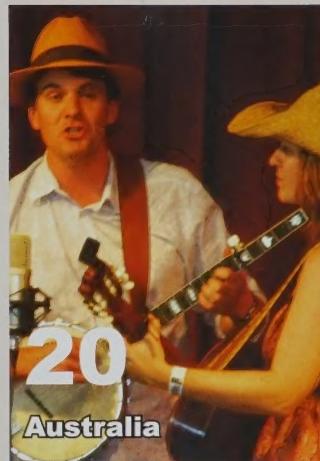
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The Avett Brothers



53

Alpha Yaya Diallo



20

Australia



45

Balkan Brass Bands

Bettye LaVette

Interpretations: The British Rock Songbook



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 emotion."
 - STEVE WINWOOD

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 of 'Don't Let the Sun Go Down On Me'."
 - ELTON JOHN

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frazey ford's top 10

Joan Armatrading
 Walking Under Ladders (A&M)

Missy Elliot
 Supa Dupa Fly (EastWest Records)

Fela Kuti
 Expensive Shit (MCA)

Al Green
 I'm Still In Love With You (Fat Possum)

Emmylou Harris
 Pieces of the Sky (WEA)

Donny Hathaway
 Donny Hathaway (Elektra/WEA)

Iron & Wine
 Our Endless Numbered Days (Sub Pop)

Van Morrison
 Veedom Fleece (Warner Bros.)

Various Artists
 Fathers and Sons: Gospel Quartet Classics (Spirit Feel)

Various Artists
 Harder They Come Soundtrack (Island)

This is Frazey Ford's all-time 10 favourite albums listed in alphabetical order. "It includes all genres because I believe all music is ultimately roots." Please see our feature on Frazey Ford on page 49.



fred's records

1. Amelia Curran
 Hunter, Hunter (WEA)

2. The Once
 The Once (Independent)

1. Matthew Hornell & The Diamond Mines
 Matthew Hornell & The Diamond Mines (Independent)

4. Hey Rosetta
 Info You Lungs (WEA)

5. Pathological Lovers
 Colling All Favours (Independent)

Based on album sales for February, March and April at Fred's Records, 198 Duckworth Street, St. John's, NL, A1C 1G5



Natalie Merchant

sillions top 10

1. Gilles Vigneault
 Refrouvailles (Independent)

2. Fred Pellerin
 Silence (Independent)

3. Elisapie Issac
 There Will Be Stars (Independent)

4. Chloé Sainte-Marie
 Nitissisenten E Tshissenitomin (GSI Musique)

5. Lhasa
 Lhasa (Audiogram)

6. Joanna Newsom
 Have One On Me (Drag City)

7. Natalie Merchant
 Learn Your Sleep (ECM Records)

8. Basia Bulat
 Heart Of My Own (Secret City)

9. Ry Cooder and The Chieftains
 San Patricio (Lustreca)

10. Youssou N'dour
 Dakar-Kingston (Universal)

Compiled from February, March and April sales at Sillions, 1140 Novem Cartier, Quebec, QC, G1R 2S9.

groundfloor music top 10

1. k.d. lang
 Recollection (Nonesuch)

2. Old Man Luedecke
 My Hands Are On Fire And Other Love Songs (Black Hen)

3. Matt Andersen
 Something In Between (Busted Flat)

4. Great Lake Swimmers
 Glitter and Doom Live (JAM)

5. Lost Channels
 The List (Netwerk)

6. Johnny Cash
 American VI (American)

7. Leonard Cohen
 The Essential Leonard Cohen (Columbia)

8. Ali Farka Toure & Toumani Diabate
 Ali & Toumani (Laker)

9. The Holmes Brothers
 Feed My Soul (Alligator)

10. Jakob Dylan
 Women And Country (Sony)

Based on album sales for February, March and April at Groundfloor Music, 13 Quebec Street, Guelph, Ontario, N1H 2T1

highlife top 10

1. Sharon Jones
I Learned The Hard Way (Daptone)
2. Gotan Project
Tango 3.0 (Yta Basta)
3. Youssou N'Dour
Dekor Kingston (Universal)
4. Gogol Bordello
Trans-Continental Hustle (Red)
5. Gil Scott-Heron
I'm New Here (XL)
6. Soul Jazz Orchestra
Rising Sun (Stylus)
7. Ali Farka Toure and Toumani Diabate
Ali and Toumani (World Circuit)
8. Roseanne Cash
The List (EMI)
9. Lee Fields
My World (Do Right)
10. Tom Waits
Glitter and Doom Live (Ariola)

Based on album sales for February, March and April at Highlife Records, 1317 Commercial Drive, Vancouver, BC, V6L 3X5

amazon uk american folk

1. Natalie Merchant
Leave Your Sleep (ECM Records)
2. Phosphorescent
Here's To Taking It Easy (Dead Oceans)
3. Mary Gauthier
The Foundling (Proper)
4. Micah P. Hinson
And the Pioneer Saboteurs (Full Time Hobby)
5. Anaïs Mitchell
Hedestown (Righteous Babe)

Based on American folk music album sales at amazon.uk
May 17 - 24



Roseanne Cash



megatunes top 10

1. Danny Michel
Live In Winnipeg (Danny Michel)
2. Johnny Cash
American VI (American)
3. Drive By Truckers
The Big To-Do (ATO)
4. Basia Bulat
Heart Of My Own (Secret City)
5. Robert Earl Keen
The Rose Hotel (Lost Highway)
6. The Holmes Brothers
Feed My Soul (Alligator)
7. Joanna Newsom
Have One On Me (Drag City)
8. Alpha Yaya Diallo
Imme (Jericho Beach)
9. Gil Scott-Heron
I'm New Here (XL)
10. Carolyn Mark & NQ Arbuckle
Let's Just Stay Here (Mim)

Based on album sales for February, March and April at Megatunes, 10355 Whyte Avenue, Edmonton, AB, T6E 1Z9

soundscapes top 10

1. Various Artists
Oxford American Magazine: Annual Southern Music Issue (Independent)
2. Timber Timbre
Timber Timbre (Arts & Crafts)
3. Tom Waits
Glitter and Doom Live (Anti)
4. Evening Hymns
Spirit Guides (Out Of This Spark)
5. David Rawlings
A Friend Of A Friend (Acronym)
6. Various Artists
Fire In My Bones (Tompkins Square)
7. Various Artists
Friends In Bellwoods II (Out Of This Spark)
8. Rosanne Cash
The List (Manhattan)
9. Various Artists
Ghana Special: Modern Highlife . . . (Soundway)
10. Various Artists
Boogaloo Pow Wow (Homest Jon)

Based on album sales for February, March and April at Soundscapes, 572 College St., Toronto, ON, M6G 1B3.

ckua top 20

1. Patty Griffin
Downtown Church (Credential)
2. Seasick Steve
Man From Another Time (Warners)
3. Basia Bulat
Heart Of My Own (Secret City)
4. Jason Collett
Rat A Tat Tat (Arts & Crafts)
5. Matthew Barber
True Believer (Outside Music)
6. Woodpigeon
Die Stadt Muzykanten (Booompa)
7. Karan Casey & John Doyle
Exiles Return (Compass)
8. The Holmes Brothers
Feed My Soul (Alligator)
9. Ghostkeeper
Ghostkeeper (Independent)
10. Angelique Kidjo
Oyo (Razor & Tie)
11. Mose Allison
The Way of the World (Anti)
12. Spoon
Transference (Merge)
13. Patty Larkin featuring Janis Ian
25 (Signature Sounds)
14. David Rawlings
A Friend Of A Friend (Acronym)
15. Ali Farka Toure and Toumani Diabate
Ali and Toumani (World Circuit)
16. Tony Furtado
Deep Water (Funafuti)
17. Ruth Minnickin & Her Bandwagon
Depend On This (Song Mill)
18. John Rutherford
Echo Broadcast (Independent)
19. Charlie Hunter
Gentlemen, I Neglected To Inform You . . . (Spire Artist Media)
20. Bassekou Kouyate & Ngoni Ba
I Speak Fula (Out I Here)

Based on the most-played folk, roots and world music discs on ckua radio – www.ckua.org throughout February, March and April.



Bassekou Kouyate & Ngoni Ba

News•Gossip•Rumour•Tattle

The future of U.S. folk magazine *Dirty Linen* appears precarious after cancelling its March/April and May/June issues.

Its problems seem to stem largely from a merger in 2007 with Visionation, a multi-media company that includes *Blues Revue* magazine amongst its portfolio. While Visionation retained former co-publishers and co-editors **Paul** and **Susan Hartman** to produce copy, their agreement stated Visionation would handle clerical, financial, subscription and distribution duties. Recently it has not had the resources to meet these obligations, says Paul Hartman.

Both Hartmans realized *Dirty Linen* was in serious trouble when their company health-care plan was cancelled without their knowledge. Neither was paid and both subsequently resigned their positions. Printing and telephone bills went unpaid. The phone was disconnected in January and its website went off-line in April.

"I can't keep working for free," says Paul. "I do not know what the plans are to resume publishing magazines, [Visionation] are putting all their resources into *Blues Revue*."

Penguin Eggs attempted several times to contact **Chip Eagle**, Visionation's majority owner, with little success. A spokesperson for *Blues Revue* said that *Dirty Linen* would resume publishing in August with a double issue but would not comment on any other aspect of the magazine. *Dirty Linen* was

founded as a *Fairport Convention* fanzine in 1983 by **T.J. McGrath**. Paul took over in 1987 and he and his wife, Susan, developed it into one of the pre-eminent folk magazines in North America with a solid subscriber base of about 2,500.



Stop the presses! Shock: **John Lydon** now considers himself a folksinger.

As the charismatic **Johnny Rotten**, frontman for the pioneering *Sex Pistols*, Lydon helped popularize punk. Now, as he is reported to have told **Elliott Johnson**, a music journalist for online magazine *The Pitch*, in April:

"Folk is a term that seems to baffle most people. The word seems to imply—and I'm aware of it, too—some asshole with long hair, a beard and a mandolin. But there is far more to it. Folk music is actually timeless music because it defies categories. It lives out of genre. It is heart and soul. It is true-speak."

Lydon is currently on his first U.S. tour in more than a decade with **Public Image Limited (PiL)**, the band he formed after the *Sex Pistols* imploded in 1978.

"When I'm onstage with PiL, that is my total heart exposed," Lydon is quoted as saying. "That is a genuine person, a human being. And I will not accept categories or labels to be put around that other than folk."



A posthumous **Willie P. Bennett** album is set for release either later this year or early in 2011. Bennett wrote, recorded and mastered 12 new songs before dying of a heart attack on Feb. 15, 2008, at his home in Peterborough, ON. **Esther Bennett**, Willie's sister, is overseeing the release of the album, titled *Sharpen The Plough*, a line taken from the track *Mama Done Callin'*. She is currently looking for a label to assist her but may release it independently. Willie won a Juno Award for his album *Heartstrings* in 1998. While his songwriting inspired the formation of **Blackie and the Rodeo Kings**, he spent most of his latter years playing mandolin and harmonica for **Fred Eaglesmith**.



Voyageur Press released an illustrated history of **Neil Young** on May 15. The 224-page *Neil Young—Long May You Run: The Illustrated History*, follows Young's long and winding career, from the early days of *Buffalo Springfield*, on through *CNSY* and, of course, his unpredictable solo career. It was produced by rock journalists **Daniel Durchholz** (*Rolling Stone*) and **Gary Graff** (*New York Times*).



A bill introduced by Congressman **Mike Quigley** (D-IL) to name a Chicago post office for the late songwriter **Steve Goodman** passed in the U.S. House of Representa-

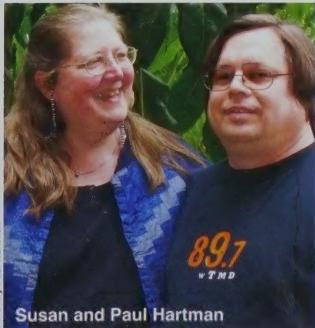
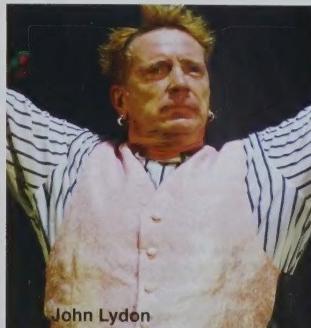
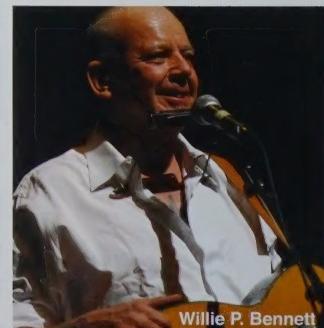


Photo By Paul Hartman

Susan and Paul Hartman



John Lydon



Willie P. Bennett

tives. The bill now moves to the Senate for consideration. Quigley's effort to memorialize and celebrate Goodman's life at the Lakeview Post Office, located at 1343 W. Irving Park Road, has the full support of the Illinois congressional delegation, the Old Town School of Folk Music, and a growing list of recording artists.

Goodman's career was inexorably intertwined with Chicago's Old Town School of Folk Music, where he learned his craft and befriended folk music luminaries such as **Roger McGuinn** and **John Prine**.

Sadly, Goodman, who wrote *The City of New Orleans*, for which he won one of his two Grammy awards, succumbed to leukemia in 1984, aged 36, after a courageous 15-year battle with the disease.



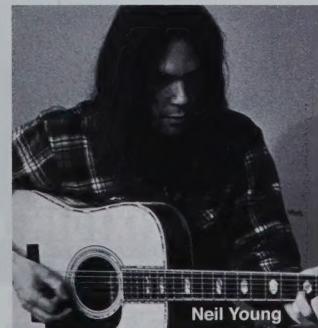
The Calgary Folk Music Festival received an approval plug in the June issue of the U.K. world music magazine *Songlines*. Published in April, it listed Calgary on its *25 of the Best International Festivals*. Under the title *Oddities* it stated: "Dance along the line where the urban meets bucolic; ... stand by to be surprised by on-the-spot artist collaborations."

Kerry Clark, Calgary's artistic director, had no idea how it came about. "Perhaps because we're so fabulous, or they became aware of us through our international marketing campaign," says Clark.

The Calgary Folk Music Festival runs July 22-25 on Prince's Island Park and will feature the likes of the **Avett Brothers**, **Laura Marling**, **Michael Franti**, **Ian Tyson** and **Roberta Flack**.



Plans are now well underway for a new folk festival in Victoria, BC. Former **Scrub**



Neil Young

MacDuhk and **The Bills** acoustic bass player **Oliver Swain**, along with friends **Bryan Skinner** and **Joelle May**, held a fundraising concert last August to provide a start-up fund for The Lower Island FolkFest Society, the non-profit organization that will eventually produce FolkWest. Swain will serve as the festival's inaugural artistic director. Although the festival site and exact dates have yet to be announced, FolkWest is a go for 2011, Swain says.

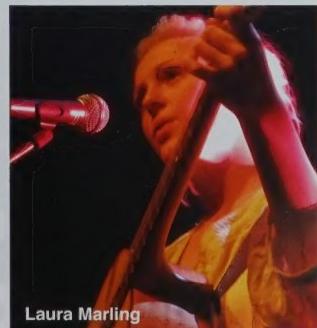


Richard Thompson has been appointed artistic director of the U.K.'s Meltdown festival. It runs at the Southbank Centre in London, June 11-21, 2010. Performers booked by Thompson to date include **Beausoleil**, **Ollabelle** and **Paulo Nutini**. Meltdown will also host a celebration of **Kate McGarrigle** featuring the likes of **Emmylou Harris**, **Anna McGarrigle** and **Rufus Wainwright**. Former artistic directors of Meltdown include **Ornette Coleman**, **David Bowie** and **Morrissey**.



Robert Plant has announced plans to tour with a new group, resurrecting the name of the band he formed before joining **Led Zeppelin**. **The Band of Joy** will draw its lineup from the American folk and country scene and include singer-songwriters **Patty Griffin**, **Darrell Scott** and guitarist/singer **Buddy Miller**. Miller will also co-produce the group's debut release on Rounder in the late summer or early autumn.

"I'm enjoying such creativity and vitality," Plant said in a statement. His last collaborative recording, *Raising Sand* with **Alison Krauss**, earned an Album of the Year Grammy in 2009.



Laura Marling

Rounder Records, one of the major independent folk-roots labels in North America, has been purchased by the Concord Music Group. Rounder's roster includes **Alison Krauss**, **Mary Chapin Carpenter**, **Béla Fleck**, **Steve Martin**, **Madeleine Peyroux**, **Robert Plant** and **Willie Nelson**. The acquisition covers more than 3,000 of Rounder's masters.

According to a press release posted on the label's website, Rounder's creative and marketing functions will continue to be based in Boston and its owners and founders Ken Irwin, Bill Nowlin and Marian Leighton Levy will remain active with the company in a creative and advisory capacity.



Caffé Lena, the oldest coffee house in the U.S., turned 50 in May. In May 1960, **Bill** and **Lena Spencer** opened the 85-seat venue at 47 Phila Street in Saratoga Springs, NY. **Bob Dylan**, **Arlo Guthrie**, **Pete Seeger**, **Loudon Wainwright** and **Ani DiFranco** are just some of the names to have performed there. Canadian **Jackie Washington** was its first booking.

"It's such an intimate, funky little place," says **Chris Wienk**, vice-president of local radio station WEXT/WMHT. "It's amazing to think of watching Bob Dylan sing just a few feet away, and imagine hearing the debut of **Don McLean's American Pie** in a room with only 80 people!"

The 50th anniversary celebrations included a fundraising concert with **Jim Kwaskin** and **Geoff Muldaur** and concerts by **Robin and Linda Williams** and **Arlo Guthrie**.



The Music Instrument Museum opened its doors April 18 in Phoenix, AZ. The



Richard Thompson

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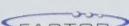
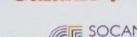
FRIDAY Evening nominee showcase at the West End Cultural Centre. **SATURDAY** Afternoon workshops and panel discussions. Ticket info available online.

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Amelia Curran

museum features 14,000 instruments from every continent and culture. It's the largest collection of its kind in the world and includes the piano on which **John Lennon** wrote *Imagine*, hardanger fiddles from Norway, a 12-foot-tall octobass that requires a ladder to play, and a common walnut, sometimes used in Italy to produce a beat in folk tunes.



Category winners at the 2010 Juno Awards held in St. John's, NL, April 17–18 included Roots and Traditional Album of the Year (Group): **The Good Lovelies**, *The Good Lovelies*; Roots and Traditional Album of the Year (Solo): **Amelia Curran**, *Hunter, Hunter*; Blues Album of the Year: **Jack de Keyzer**, *The Corktown Sessions*; World Music Album of the Year: **Dominic Manasco**, *Comfortably Mine*; and Aboriginal Album of the Year: **Digging Roots**, *We Are*.



Murder Folk Nights—a monthly music series dedicated to covering the gamut of extremely morbid material both traditional and popular—began April 7 at the Press Club, 850 Dundas Street West, Toronto.

According to the Murder Folk Facebook page: "Murder folk is a self-coined style of folk music ... often dealing with subjects of killing your cheating lover, bank robberies, depression-era acts of amoral desperation, disaster capitalism, lewd and unholy courtships, suicide, insanity ... anything totally inappropriate."



Canada Day celebrations on July 1 in London's Trafalgar Square will include performances by **Eccodek**, **Sarah Harmer**, **Jully Black**, **Hawksley Workman** and **Dan Mangan**. Presented by the Canadian Independent Music Association, this is the

fifth year for the event. A crowd of 5,000 people are expected to turn up for the event. Eccodek will also appear at the Vancouver Folk Festival (July 16–18).



Singer-songwriter and Shelter Valley Folk Festival co-founder **Aengus Finnian** has been appointed touring and audience development officer for the Ontario Arts Council. In his new role, Finnian will work to reinforce OAC's ongoing commitment to touring, presenting and audience development for the arts. He has released two albums and acted as Shelter Valley's artistic director for seven years.



Canadian folk, roots and world musicians who have released recordings between June 15, 2009, and June 14, 2010, can now submit their work for the 2010 Canadian Folk Music Awards (CFMAs). For complete details on eligibility, applications and criteria, visit www.folkawards.ca. The sixth annual CFMA will take place at Pantages Playhouse Theatre in Winnipeg on Saturday, Nov. 20.



The Ontario Society of Psychotherapists will co-present a benefit in Toronto, Saturday, Oct. 30, in support of Panzi Hospital in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The organizers, however, require musical assistance—an "Afro-centric group" or possibly a Congolese band—to supply the entertainment. There is a moderate compensation for performers. For more details, contact

Agnes Struik at 416-778-7790.



After three rounds of voting, Evolve was voted Best Music Festival in Canada by listeners of CBC Radio 3's *Spotlight*. The Antigonish, NS, event beat out several folk festivals including Vancouver Island, Shelter Valley and Folk On The Rocks. It's a rather tenuous title, all the same, considering all festivals actively solicited votes from their patrons. The contest had nothing to do with artistic merit. Evolve, it would seem, has the most active fans.



The Toronto Blues Society celebrated its 25th anniversary on May 28 at the Gladstone Hotel. Performers at the event included **Shakura S'Aida**, **Fathead**, **The 24th Street Wailers** and **Harrison Kennedy**. The society was formed in 1985 to ensure that blues had a continued presence in Toronto. It produces monthly events and provides the organizational backbone for the annual Maple Blues Awards. For more information about the society, contact info@torontobluesociety.com.



Cesaria Evora, the world-famous singer from Africa's Cape Verde, underwent open-heart surgery May 10 in a Paris hospital. The surgery was in response to a coronary problem. Evora has suspended all her musical activities until the end of the year. She also suffered a stroke in April 2008.



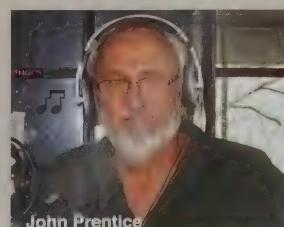
I am a DJ — I am what I play

John Prentice broadcasts *Planet Mainstage* from the University of Manitoba campus and community radio station UMFM 101.5 FM.

An avid music fan, Prentice has spent more than 30 years as a volunteer and board member of the Winnipeg Folk Festival and at the city's West End Cultural Centre. Once a week, since 1999, he hosts the best in world and folk music, offering "everthing from Little Miss Higgins to Basskou Kouyate". *Planet Mainstage* offers news about local gigs and features interviews with regional, national and international performers, the likes of The Duhks,

Harry Manx, Amelia Curran, Dougie MacLean and Richie Havens.

John Prentice can be heard Saturdays from 14:00 to 16:00 central time at UMFM 101.5 FM or at UMFM.COM on the Internet.



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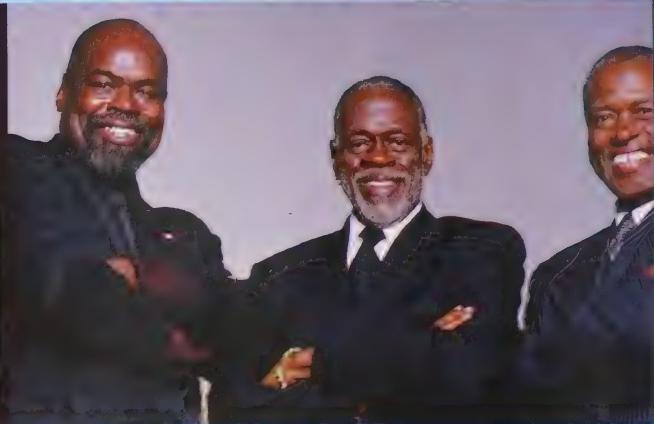
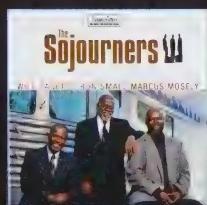
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Stéphane Grappelli (violin) and Diz Disley (bottom right, guitar)

Diz Disley 1931-2010

Diz Disley, the eccentric, multi-talented Canadian-born guitarist who is credited with reviving the flagging career of violinist Stéphane Grappelli in the 1970s, died March 22 in London. He was 78, writes Roddy Campbell.

Although born in Winnipeg to a Welsh father, the family returned to the U.K. when Diz was four. He grew up in Ingleton, North Yorkshire, England, and learned to play first the banjo and then the guitar. Most important, he developed a passion for the acoustic jazz of the French guitarist Django Reinhardt.

As the trad jazz revival took root in England in the late '40s and early '50s, Disley would work with such high profile figures as Ken Colyer, George Melly and Kenny Ball.

A gifted illustrator, Disley worked between gigs as a cartoonist with *Melody Maker* magazine and various national newspapers. A budding career as a jazz radio presenter ended abruptly when he was briefly imprisoned for contempt of an income tax court.

He also became a leading figure in the skiffle movement of the '50s, working alongside the likes of Lonnie Donegan and Nancy Whiskey. Skiffle brought Disley in contact with the folk scene. And from the early '60s, he played the folk circuit with various acoustic jazz bands paying homage to Reinhardt. Often he drove to gigs in a temperamental yellow Rolls Royce hearse. In 1967, Disley was a guest alongside

Martin Carthy on Dave Swarbrick's first instrumental album, *Rags, Reels and Airs*, produced by Joe Boyd. Disley also played on Sandy Denny's album *Like an Old Fashioned Waltz* released in 1973.

That same year, a chance meeting with Grappelli, then aged 65, led to an unlikely co-appearance at the Cambridge Folk Festival. The phenomenal response they generated resulted in a partnership that lasted for 10 years. Together they toured the world and performed at such major venues as New York's Carnegie Hall.

Disley went on to form a partnership with the young Gypsy guitarist Birelli Lagrene and became a mentor for the celebrated violinist Nigel Kennedy. Disley continued to tour until a heart attack and the onset of dementia.

Charlie Gillett 1942-2010

Renowned British radio host and author Charlie Gillett has died in London after a long bout of illness. He was 68, writes Roddy Campbell.

As a writer, Gillett's acclaimed *The Sound of the City*, published in 1971, is still considered the first major study of rock 'n' roll. His main medium, however, would become radio.

From *Honky Tonk*, his 1970s Radio London show, which concentrated largely on American roots and the offerings of independent labels in the U.K., to his more recent weekly broadcasts on the BBC World Service, his discoveries were legion and legendary.

He introduced his listeners to the likes of Youssou N'Dour, Salif Keita, Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan and Mariza. But the best known story about Gillett involves a young Mark Knopfler, who handed him a demo of *Sultans of Swing* in 1976 to play on *Honky Tonk*. By the time the song had ended, Gillett's little studio had taken calls from half the A&R men in London.

By all accounts a warm and congenial man, he moved from BBC Radio London to Capital, the city's commercial station, in 1979. Sacked in 1983, he was brought back by public demand and launched *A Foreign Affair*, which nurtured his growing interest in what we now know as world music. Gillett credited a live London performance by the Senegalese singer Youssou N'Dour as the main catalyst for this shift in direction.

In 1995 Gillett returned to work for BBC Radio, presenting a weekly roundup on the BBC World Service and a succession of two-hour shows on BBC London. He was also a regular presenter of Radio 3's *World on 3*.

In recent years he contracted a disease of the autoimmune system that forced him off the air. He died March 17 of a heart attack.

Penguin Eggs also notes other passings in brief: **Ljiljana Butler**, the expressive Balkan singer known as the mother of Gypsy soul, died April 26. Pioneering Aboriginal singer-songwriter **Ruby Hunter** passed away Feb. 17. Hunter was the first Australian indigenous woman to be signed to a major record label. **Etelvina Maldonado**, one of the leading Colombian traditional bulerue singers, died Jan. 26, aged 75, in Cartagena de Indias.



Photo: Audra Neiki

The Big Buzz



Daniel, Fred and Julie

Daniel, Fred and Julie

Take three young contemporary alternative pop singers, sit them in front of an analogue tape recorder, and you get the folkiest of folk albums produced in this country for a long time.

Daniel, Fred and Julie weren't around when the Weavers were playing campuses in the '50s and early '60s, but you'd think that was all they ever listened to. Gorgeous three-part harmonies sung with the joy that used to come out of hootenannies, all recorded on quarter-inch tape in living mono.

The album—and it looks like an old vinyl album—was the brainchild of Daniel Romano, who usually plays rock music in a band called Attack In Black and runs the You've Changed Records label out of his basement in Welland, ON. Romano found a bunch of old public domain songs in a book of traditional songs, liked the lyrics, and called his friend Fred Squire to record his arrangement and melodies of the traditional tunes, along with two Romano originals.

When they got together in a friend's garage in Sackville, NB, Julie Doiron—who has a busy, successful indie-rock career of her own—was hanging out with Squire, her bandmate and friend. Doiron asked if she could sing with them, and Daniel, Fred and Julie became a unit that is starting to get a lot of attention.

"I didn't expect anything to come of it—none of us did," Romano says. "It was just a fun thing to do, but I guess people liked it."

They sat for a couple of August days with the garage door open, in front of one microphone and a four-track reel-to-reel tape machine. The mix, if you want to call it that, was the lead singer moving his or her chair closer to the mic. The quarter-inch version was then bounced down to cassette tape. No pitch control, no effects, no WAV files, not one byte. Just the sound of three friends enjoying one another's musical company.

While the album is a departure for them, Romano says it's the music he was raised on, before he rebelled in his youth. Except for *Clementine*, Romano wrote all the melodies on the album, which also includes arrangements of songs such as *I Dream of Jeannie* and *Hallelujah I'm a Bum*, as well as more obscure traditional songs.

"None of the music, at least to my understanding, is even close to what the music originally had been. I just made it up."

Billy Bragg's *Mermaid Avenue*, a collection of previously unrecorded Woody Guthrie songs, comes to mind.

This project is a new direction for Doiron as well. While her mother loved fiddle music and her grandmother sang old songs from the '20s when she was a youngster, she was always into rock music.

It's also surprising to Doiron how people have responded to the album. "We didn't have any expectations. We just wanted to do it for fun, although we're happy with the way it turned out."

It's also different from her other projects, including a summer tour with Gord Downie. "But it's all music. Gord's songs tell a lot of stories as well. They're not murder ballads, but they're good stories."

They started with a small press run of 500 LPs and 1,000 CDs, and are almost completely sold out. The trio is planning a fall western tour, and talking about another disc. Welcome to the world of folk music.

—By Mike Sadava

Rob Lutes

When Rob Lutes names the defunct Spectrum as his favourite Montreal nightspot, you know that the Toronto-born, New Brunswick-raised musician is a true-blue Montrealer. The Spectrum, demolished in 2007 after a glorious quarter-century as a cabaret-style concert hall, presented everyone from Miles Davis to U2 to Celine Dion. Lutes played there himself years ago as an unlikely acoustic opener for legendary Canadian hard rockers Frank Marino and Mahogany Rush.

That opener worked, says the roots/blues musician. His abiding fondness for the Spectrum, he adds, is rooted in "great memories. I saw Bela Fleck, John Hiatt, so many people there."

If you're visiting Montreal and looking



Rob Lutes

for a rootsy musical night out, by the way, Lutes recommends Le Divan Orange on boulevard Saint-Laurent and, on rue Ste-Ambroise, the Centre St.-Ambroise, a small entertainment spot that serves beer from the micro-brewery next door.

The excitement produced by Montreal's mix, and sometimes clash, of French and English cultures stimulates creativity, says Lutes. "I always thought it was a place to go and enjoy yourself. For me, writing tunes is about letting yourself go. Montreal is just a great place to do that."

Thanks to bands like Arcade Fire and Wolf Parade, Montreal is a virtual indie rock and pop mecca. Lutes points out that the city has also long been associated with folk music, the late Kate McGarrigle and Leonard Cohen being among the frontrunners.

Lutes says Montreal has not only sparked his creativity but sometimes influenced specific songs, such as *The Autumn Light*, the thoughtful closer to his excellent 2008 CD *Truth and Fiction*. The song, which you can download for a dollar at www.roblutes.com/downloads.cfm, finds the musician homeward bound in the wee hours, mulling over directions taken and the fleeting nature of time.

"I was driving home from a gig in Victoriaville (in central Quebec) in the winter, and it was really late and really cold, and I was on an abandoned highway. There's sometimes this sense in Quebec of being in a different place. I felt a little displaced."

The song closes, however, with the affirmative line, "Living takes a gentle touch / Like fingers setting strings on fire."

Lutes has been writing up a storm of late, and his next album should be out this fall. "When the songs are there, you should go and do them. The last album was so enjoyable to make that I wanted to keep going."

If the next CD is anything like past ones, we can expect to hear shades of Florida-born Chris Smither ("my favourite songwriter of the last 10 years") and Ray Bonneville, who divides his time between Montreal and Austin, TX. ("I can definitely get into the groove Ray gets into"). Which is not to detract from Lutes's originality, one of the attributes that got him nominated for English Songwriter of the Year at the recent Canadian Folk Music Awards and which netted him, years ago, top spot in the Kerrville New Folk Songwriting Competi-

tion. But those shades do underscore a certain brotherhood of sensibility among some top-notch roots musicians.

As to leaving Montreal to tour, says Lutes, "When I'm on the road, I drink it in and enjoy it. When I get back home, it always hits me how much I miss my rituals, like going to the bagel shop."

—By Patrick Langston

Douglas Cameron

Like the bison and the lynx, the traditional Cape Breton fiddler was once thought to be on the brink of extinction. A 1971 landmark CBC documentary, *The Vanishing Cape Breton Fiddler*, by filmmaker Ron MacInnis drew attention to the decline of that too-rare cultural fixture. The film fortunately helped ignite a remarkable revival in the ancient Gaelic music that had long incubated on the island.

Now the fiddler is no longer vanishing and the traditions continue to strengthen from the roots up. The debut CD by 16-year-old fiddler Douglas Cameron proves the music of Winston Scotty Fitzgerald, Dan R. MacDonald and a host of other players is in good hands.

Cameron is one of the most gifted young players of the latest generation of Cape Breton fiddlers. Quiet and humble, Cameron takes his cues from the older players who paved the path.

The young musician was born the same year Ashley MacIsaac electrified the music

world with *Hi How Are You Today*, a triple-platinum selling album that broke open the market for Celtic music. That wave has since waned but the core of the tradition that spawned Ashley, Natalie MacMaster and others continues unabated.

Cameron lives at home in tiny Belle Cote in Inverness County, halfway between Mabou and Cheticamp, where he recorded the album in the home studio of J.P. Cormier.

"A few years ago, J.P. was playing at the Normaway Barn and they got me up to play with him," recalls Cameron. "He told me he wanted to record me when I got older. So we took up that offer."

Cormier added some terrific guitar accompaniment with Hilda Chiasson-Cormier driving the piano behind the fiddle. Cameron's father, Lawrence, and grandmother Catherine and local hero Joey Beaton also add some piano accompaniment. Young musicians Colin Grant and Marc Boudreau add some extra fiddle power on the spectacular *Tullochgorum* set.

The 13-cut album, with its spare arrangements, boot-to-the-floor percussion and traditional embellishments, is a nod of Cameron's young head to the giants of Cape Breton who came before.

"I like the settings to be the way the tunes were meant to be played," explains Cameron. "In Cape Breton, it's important to get the right tempos and play it like the other great players."

Cameron rhymes off the *Who's Who* of local fiddle superstars as influences—"Buddy, John Morris Rankin, Ashley and Natalie,



Douglas Cameron

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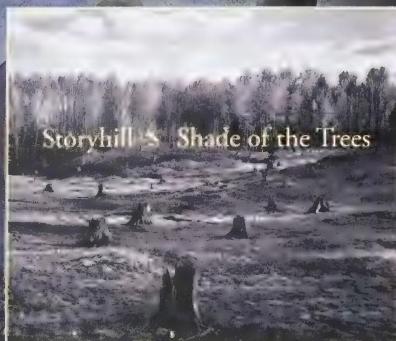
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"I appreciate that a lot of Cape Breton fiddlers aren't in it for the show-off thing—I like the humble approach."

He got his first fiddle at age seven and took a few lessons, but it didn't take right away. "The fiddle was too big and I quit for two years." Like his father and grandmother, he played piano and built a foundation of musical knowledge on the keyboard.

By nine, he was back at the fiddle.

"There were a lot of other people my age getting at the fiddle. Seeing people who got really successful at it—like Buddy, Natalie and Ashley—made me want to be like them. But that turned out harder than I first thought."

One of the timeless measuring sticks for Cape Breton fiddlers is playing the dancehalls of Inverness County, where the knowledgeable dancers spin and step away the evening with square sets. The fiddler has to keep the tempos spot on, while pouring out an endless stream of reels, strathspeys, jigs and marches.

"Those dances are some of my favourite gigs," says Cameron. "It's a great connection between the fiddler and the audience. They're all dancing to my music, and I love that."

—By Sandy MacDonald

Dominic Mancuso

"*B*ringing *O Sole Mio* into the 21st century," is Dominic Mancuso's (perhaps slightly tongue-in-cheek) response to a question about his innovative approach to Italian music traditions. One measure of the success of that approach is his 2010 Juno Award for World Music Album of the Year for *Comfortably Mine*.

Comfortably Mine is a charming mix of traditional Italian folk songs, music by contemporary songwriters, and what Mancuso dubs "nostalgic anthems for his Italian community." Mancuso's Italian community may be located in southern Ontario, but his roots are from the southern part of Italy, and the album is a kind of homage to his forefathers.

"I wanted to show gratitude and honour for the culture I feel so privileged to have inherited," says Mancuso. "But the idea



Dominic Mancuso

was to avoid clichés, by allowing the repertoire the opportunity to synthesize through me, a Canadian living in one of the most culturally diverse cities on the planet—Toronto."

As a result the music on *Comfortably Mine* is at times a frank hybridization of styles, at others a subtle evolution of tradition. A piece like *Curuna* is a perfect example of the former, starting with a Sicilian folk melody, adding Arabic percussion riffs, a shuffle groove and a Funk Brothers-type bass line—plus accordion and B3 organ. Riding over it all is Mancuso's voice, capable of the raw expressiveness of blues or flamenco. It's music that's passionate, unique, and utterly credible.

Mancuso has never been a purist, no surprise. But he thinks his way of looking at music is an incontrovertible reality of our times. "We are cross-pollinating, marinating, and re-iterating a common truth ... that music is a universal language."

But it's the way he approaches specific language that's one of the reasons the album is such a pleasure to listen to. "I find the cadence and resonance of words and language just as exciting as accessing various timbres," he acknowledges. "... I paint sonically, that's what I do ... one has to create a sonic experience."

The sonic experience Mancuso was perhaps best known for prior to his solo, Juno-winning recording is a collaborative effort known as The Sicilian Jazz Project, featuring a collective of musicians led by guitarist Michael Occhipinti. Their work parallels Mancuso's in that it mixes Sicilian folk music with other styles, including jazz (and has done so to international critical acclaim).

And that's far from Mancuso's only other musical pursuit. There's *MANCUSO 2*, a collaboration with his brother, visual artist Vince Mancuso, not to mention a performance in the off-Broadway production *Tarantella*, for which he also acted as musical director.

Still, receiving a Juno for his solo recording is a special thrill. "It validates the fact that my work on this particular record, both as a producer and as a performer/arranger/singer has been accepted by my contemporaries working in the industry," he says.

As for that chestnut *O Solo Mio*, yes he does bring it into the 21st century, without a hint of the typical, operatic treatment. Mancuso turns it into an intimate whisper of a song, one that may make it (even if you've heard the song countless times) quite comfortably yours.

—By Li Robbins

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For over a decade, **Solas** has been recognized as the most influential Irish-American super group. After a personnel change prior to their last release when Co. Kilkenny-born vocalist **Mairead Phelan** joined the band, they have re-emerged, unified once again. On **THE TURNING TIDE**, the band delivers the raw instrumental virtuosity, the power and rhythmic 'hump', and the dynamic vocal blend that no other band since The Bothy Band has mastered.



THE JOHN HARTFORD STRINGBAND MEMORIES OF JOHN

MEMORIES OF JOHN was recorded to commemorate the life and music of **John Hartford**. The core of the project is

The John Hartford Stringband—Chris Sharp, Bob Carlin, Alison Brown, Mike Compton and Mark Schatz. Special guests Tim O'Brien, Bela Fleck, Alan O'Bryant, George Buckner and Eileen Carson Schatz join the band on renditions of hit original John Hartford songs, traditional fiddle tunes, country and bluegrass songs refashioned by Hartford, as well as a few rarely heard Hartford originals written shortly before his death. But the most special guest on the CD is **John Hartford** himself who appears on several previously un-released tracks.



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- *Irish Music Magazine (IRE)*



JOHN MCSHERRY SOMA

"A masterpiece of restraint and nobility...His scattering of self-composed tunes still bear many traces of his rhythmic escapades with Lúnasa. Aptly christened, Soma is a highly balanced and controlled body of work." - *Irish Times (IRE)*



MICHAEL MCGOLDRICK AURORA

"One of the most adventurous yet intelligently configured sounds currently to be heard in any genre." - *The Independent (UK)*



JEREMY KITTEL CHASING SPARKS

"There's an all-star lineup of guests - but the spotlight belongs to Kittel, one of the most accomplished and gifted string players of his generation. This is a fiddle disc that sizzles!" - *Strings Magazine (US)*

Jack Marks

Most musicians testify career moments require a highway, the linking of places, the subsequent connection with strangers hitting each new town. No alien to the stage, Jack Marks rather frequently plays either downstairs at the Dakota or the impossibly cosy Cameron in Toronto with his seven-man ensemble, the Lost Wages.

Yet he's almost the only musician I've ever talked to far more interested in recording than map exploring, to an incumbent exclusion of traipsing around the country. For now, at least.

"I haven't toured since I put out my first record," the singer explains without worry. "I stuck around and decided I had too much music I wanted to record, that my time would be better spent in the studio. I have this idea, this goal, of being prolific, so I write constantly and have a lot of backlog of songs I edit and work on. I think every artist, sort of the purpose of why they play, is to keep creating. I want to make more records more than anything else."

Decidedly old-timey, Marks's music is as timeless as advertised—standup bass and mandolin flood around his skinny-cat, country-blues growl on his debut *Two of Everything*.

He compares pretty favorably to Steve Earle, though without the high-nasal yowl.

Having been through just three decades, Marks sounds like he's made a lot of no-refund choices, which—given the poverty band name, and the fact his two degrees add only intangible qualities to his chosen career—just might be the case. You have to work pretty hard to be a career musician in Toronto, too.

"You do. It's great to have loyal musicians with you who are willing to go with you through the lean times until you can crack through," he says gratefully. Among these is his producer, David Baxter, who's been pro since '75 when he played with David Wilcox's Teddy Bears. Baxter, who's produced Bob Snider, Northern Pikes, Penny Lang and others, is at work recording with Marks again, and plays steel in studio and live. "He adds lots of colour," Marks smiles, "and obviously seniority with the band ... which helps."

Marks's little brother, Robbie, is also in the lineup, rhythm and lead guitar. "He's 10 years younger than me. I went away to school for a long time, but we've always been close. He honed his chops while I was away and it's a perfect fit."

Marks sees his friends as being part of a long lineage of Toronto roots history, one which "ebbs and flows," but stretches back decades. Some of the atmosphere of the record is certainly interchangeably Great Depression/Recession ... though not overtly political or autobiographical.

"There's a lot of characters in my songs,



Jack Marks

for sure. I try and consciously avoid stuff that's too personal, heart on sleeve. I appreciate songwriting as a craft which has various angles to approach the song. The way the music industry is so mainstream right now it's nice to have something a little more wholesome and some stories worth listening to and worth telling."

—By Fish Griwkowsky

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Q1: What Jim Schmitz saw in that Gogol Bordello gig? <http://tiny.cc/meyarw>

Q2: Name the acoustic band that provided the score for *Brooklyn's Finest*?

The Avett Brothers and Gogol Bordello represent a new and energizing shift in contemporary noisy music. And Story Braund has very kindly provided us with six copies of each band's latest. To win one, answer the questions below correctly and e-mail your answers to penguin_eggs@shaw.ca. Please include a proper contact name and a postal mailing address.

The answer to the Martin Bergman contest is: Bixby Drury.

And the winner is: Wendy Bergman, Winnipeg, MB. Her address: Pickering, ON, L1V 1L2.



and Brad Drury, Vancouver, BC; Jim Davies, London, ON; Steve Taramini, Nepean, ON; Gavin Keay, Dundas, ON; Gregoire Lalonde, St. John's, NL.



The Three Sisters, Katoomba

The Lucky Country

Penguin Eggs sent its staff to three major Australian music festivals this spring. They covered 4000 kilometres in four weeks and ran into some very familiar faces and rather noisy parrots. Words by Roddy Campbell and Annemarie Hamilton. Photos by Roddy Campbell.

The Australian customs form causes concern.

"Do you have a criminal record? Check: Yes or No."

Hmmm! If we say no, do they still let us in? I know, I know, it's an old one.

Appropriately enough, though, we land literally on Botany Bay. Capt. James Cook

first set ashore there in April 1770, and it became the main harbour for the convict ships sent from the British Isles and the inspiration for several great folk songs:

*There's the captain as is our commandeer,
There's bo'sun and all the ship's crew
There's first and the second-class passengers,
Knows what we poor convicts goes through*

*Singing too-rall, li-oo-rall, li-ad-di-ty,
Singing too-rall, li-oo-rall, li-ay,
Singing too-rall, li-oo-rall, li-ad-di-ty
Oh we are bound for Botany Bay*

Unlike their Canadian counterparts, customs officials at Sydney Airport are friendly and efficient. And as Eric Bogle's song goes, it's: "Another lovely day in Sydney, sunshine fallin' down like honey...". But we're off to Katoomba and the Blue Mountains Music Festival, an hour's drive west in our rented car.

Australians drive on the left-hand side of the road. They also have toll booths for their highways, which, we find out, require detours to make payments. The woman at the first one we discover laughs when we tell her we might have missed a few. That

easygoing nature, it becomes clear, is a national trait.

Kat-oom-ba is an Aboriginal term for shining, falling water and refers to a nearby waterfall that drops hundreds of feet into the Jamieson Valley. The town (pop. 7,623) promotes itself as the Gateway to the Blue Mountains—a UNESCO World Heritage Area—as it sits on the periphery of spectacular rock formations older than the Grand Canyon. The most famous being The Three Sisters—stunning sandstone outcrops sacred to the Aborigines.

We've rented a delightful little cottage here for the next three nights. On our first



Pascal Gemme of Genticorum



Giant ferns in Jamieson Valley



A cockatoo in Katoomba

morning, several cockatoos swoop over the garden, squawking and swirling. We're absolutely mesmerized, having never seen such exotic birds outside of a pet shop or a zoo.

The festival site is housed on the grounds of a local school. Two massive tents host headliners such as Nanci Griffith, Dougie MacLean, Chris Smither, Uncle Earl, Josh White Jr., and local favourites The Kransky Sisters, who adorn the cover of the program booklet—which is, surprisingly, free. There are eight smaller stages for individual concerts, although one is set aside for teaching workshops and includes a discussion on “The Politics of Porn”.

Top of our to-do list? Catch Quebec's Genticorum. By all accounts, they are building a serious reputation for themselves in Australia. And they are in great form, too, deservedly earning their encore. We make plans to meet up later and head out to catch the Kranskys. Their Transylvanian shtick, inside humour and lo-fi pop covers

leaves us bewildered. This charming, easily accessible, mid-size festival has much more to offer.

To the editor's delight, a genuine swagman wanders around the site, freely quoting the epic bush poetry of Banjo Patterson, Henry Lawson and such like. The children's entertainment area is fun and packed. Then again, most of the venues are well attended. We catch ho-hum Irish singer Eleanor McEvoy's set and Mamadou Diabate's wonderful kora workshop before heading for a jar at the nearby Clarendon Hotel.

There we bump into Dougie MacLean and his wife, Jenny, a wonderful water-colour artist. Jenny is originally from Katoomba and fills us in on local lore. Dougie's had a banner year back in Scotland, where his *Caledonia* was picked as the theme song for Homecoming Scotland 2009—a massive, year-long celebration of Scotland's rich heritage centred around the 250th anniversary of Robert Burns's birth. The promotional adverts for these events featured such celebrities as Sean Connery and Lulu singing various verses. And Dougie tells us *Caledonia* now has a malt whiskey named in its honour. Sadly, he has only a miniature bottle with him and it's needed for non-medicinal purposes.

Back at the festival, Chris Smither treds the boards. His warm, easygoing manner and casual, accomplished folk and acoustic blues prove totally engaging.

And then our jet lag kicks in.

Up with the cockatoos the following day, we sit in on Genticorum again and share

a sandwich with Pascal Gemme, their fiddler. Pascal transcribes the fiddle tunes for *Penguin Eggs*. His wife has just had a baby back in Quebec and he misses them both sorely. Life on the road...

But back to the business at hand: Josh White Jr. and Uncle Earl are quite splendid. The Blues Preachers offer little in the way of innovation, unlike the exceptional country-folk-rock of Western Australia's Pilgrim Brothers—the discovery of the weekend, by the editor's reckoning. Former Van Morrison sideman Brian Kennedy leaves



Sydney Opera House

us cold. Mikelangelo and the Black Sea Gentlemen sport a brilliant name; let's just leave it at that. But Dougie MacLean is his usual charming self, totally connected with his audience as he continually encourages them to sing along to such songs as *Ready for the Storm*, *Singing Land* and *This Love Will Carry*.

A couple of more jars at the Clarendon now appear in order and this time we run into Nanci Griffith. Her single entourage consists of legendary roadie Phil Kaufman. He gained notoriety in 1973 after snatching his friend Gram Parsons's body from Los Angeles International Airport and cremating it at Joshua Tree National Park. Kaufman remains the life and soul of the party, a hilarious raconteur.

Nanci's due onstage, though, and we all trundle off to the Big Top. She's absolutely riveting solo, creating an assured and relaxed balance between her past recordings and latest release, *The Loving Kind*, a comeback album of sorts. Whatever. Griffith's contagious appeal concludes our weekend on a Blue Mountain high.

The following morning we head back to Sydney, one of the world's truly beauti-



Phil Kaufman and Annmarie Hamilton



The Twelve Apostles

ful cities. Best seen by boat, we spend a brilliant day on the water exploring the picturesque inlets and inner harbours that stretch as far as Watsons Bay on the edge of the ocean.

Our travel itinerary also requires a camper van, our home away from home for the next three weeks. We will log almost 4,000 kilometres, which might provide some idea of the size of this southeastern corner of Australia.

Time constraints require a direct route towards Melbourne rather than the more scenic coastal road, which we save for the return journey. The interior landscape looks

like the foothills between Calgary and Canmore. We camp overnight at Holbrook, a small town with the one traffic light between Sydney and Melbourne. It also has a full-size submarine sitting in a local park. Obviously, they take global warming seriously in these parts. Then it's on through Glen Rowan and bushranger Ned Kelly country to the wine region surrounding the suburbs of east Melbourne. Eventually we emerge on the shore of the Bass Strait close to the small village of Inverloch. There we'll spend several idyllic days with family and friends before moving on to Apollo Bay and its annual hooley.

Barely out of Inverloch, a water hose ruptures in our van and it overheats. Gradually, it limps along to a nearby garage and there the mechanic takes pity on us. "I can see you two are going to be more trouble than the first settlers," he quips. But he goes out of his way to get us back on the road within an hour.

Apollo Bay (pop. 1,780) sits on the breathtaking Great Ocean Road. A sign on the outskirts of town simply reinforces our initial impressions: "A Piece of Paradise." Indeed, indeed. During the festival, the town turns its main street into a pedestrian walkway and most of the events are held within close

proximity. Like Katoomba, the mainstages are housed in two large tents. There are 11 venues in all.

The lineup here is more eclectic with indie rock bands accounting for a fair portion of the bill. For us the weekend's music starts with two random choices: Whitley, just Whitley, and Caitlin Harnett. And our luck's in. They both prove impressive performers



and talented singer-songwriters. Harnett will require further investigation back in Canada. No such good fortune with The Vaudevillians, though, as they crank out clichéd covers of *Rawhide* and the theme tune for *Bonanza*. The Bay of Pigs offer little respite. More interesting by far are The Wilson Pickers, an edgy bluegrass band that bills itself as "booze-grass". Their fans are the most fervent at the festival. They buy us drinks and become our best pals.

While every village and town in Britain has its fish and chip vendors, the Australian equivalent is pie shops. They are everywhere, and the choices are staggering. We've developed a taste for steak and mushroom and lamb and rosemary, and that's our late lunch before The Stillsons.

Country proves a massive influence on Australia music and The Stillsons successfully straddle acoustic alt.country and roots-rock, somewhere between Gillian Welch and Blackie and the Rodeo Kings. Their bass player, Troy Gennoe, also tours with The Waifs, as does drummer and singer-songwriter David Ross MacDonald. And he shows up from Ballarat, an old gold-mining town north of here. Dave, it turns out, is housesitting for a friend, while working on his next record. He and The Waifs will tour



always, a show-stopper. It's also a gutsy inclusion considering the damage and lives lost to forest fires in the Melbourne area this past year. Later I see one wag walking around with a T-shirt that reads: "Run for the Hills Before They Burn." Obviously, not a sensitive soul.

We catch up with James, Hugh and Dave over a few fine outdoor local lagers. But the temperature drops and we need warmer clothing to enjoy The Flatlanders, the re-united Texas trio of Joe Ely, Butch Hancock and Jimmie Dale Gilmore. With so much talent and experience onstage how could they possibly fail? Despite a powerful performance the crowd's reaction remains, on the whole, lukewarm. Strange. Whatever, we give The Stillsons another listen and turn in.

In the early morning rain, our campsite looks like an outtake from *The Night of the Living Dead*. Numerous youthful men and women stagger around in a state of collective inertia. Some sport one shoe, others none at all. Scattered empty beer cans and wine bottles attest to a co-operative night on the raz'. "Youth," as George Bernard Shaw once said, "is wasted on the young." That's probably a bit harsh but we don wreaths of garlic and set off to hear Eddi Reader and discuss *Penguin Eggs*' world domination with Internet guru David Ross MacDonald. Reader's in superb form, despite the time of day. *Penguin Eggs*' conquest of the planet, however, remains a work in progress.

We bid adieu to Apollo Bay as the rain turns serious. The Twelve Apostles beckon. It's Sunday after all. These spectacular limestone stacks, eroded by the constant movement of the sea, line the Victoria coastline. They are, obviously, a must-see for tourists travelling through this region and deserve due reverence. We continue on



Canada this summer and fall.

Over at the intimate Mechanics Institute, James Keelaghan and Hugh MacMillan sound check, and it's so good to see them. James is such a brilliant ambassador for Canadian folk music. He opens with *What's For You...* from his recent *House of Cards*, and heads in the crowd immediately nod in recognition of a talent a cut above. *Cold Missouri Waters* and its depiction of the Mann Gulch forest fire in Montana is, as



to the old whaling harbour of Port Campbell for no other reason than its name. It's the farthest point east we venture, the turning point on our trip. All roads now lead to Canberra and the National Folk Festival.

It takes almost four days to get there as we meander up the gorgeous Sapphire Coast. At the aptly named town of Eden we arise to the most god-awful sound of screeching. The source, we discover, comes from a bird feeder covered in countless green, yellow and blue parrots—an unforgettable sea of living colour.

Eventually we arrive in the nation's

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A morris dancer at the National

capital in splendid sunshine. Jane Speechley from public relations meets us at the festival gate and organizes our passes and camping. Like her colleagues at the two previous events we've attended, she's welcoming and helpful.

With the van safely parked, we catch a bus to the National Art Gallery of Australia for the *Masterpieces From Paris* exhibition, one of the largest and most valuable collections of art ever shown in the country. It features 112 paintings by the leading Impressionists—Vincent van Gogh, Claude Monet, Paul Gauguin, Paul Cézanne, Georges Seurat—all a complete joy.

Back at the festival, the Hon. Peter Garrett, the former Midnight Oil singer and current Minister for Environment, Protection, Heritage and the Arts, welcomes everyone to the opening night concert. Each of the six performers (James Keelaghan and Patty Larkin included) plays three songs, a taster to whet appetites for the real smorgasbord that starts the following day.

Two children struggling with *Mary Had A Little Lamb* on their recorders serves as our morning alarm. And while the needle exchange in the men's toilet proves sobering, a nice cup of tea and a browse through the program sets the world to rights.

So let us tell you all about the National Folk Festival—one of the great events of its kind anywhere in the world. It runs for

five days in the massive, enclosed Exhibition Park and offers 19 stages, more than half used for tuition workshops. Their titles include *How To Steal A Song* or *How To Destroy A Folk Song*. Dance lessons range from Appalachian clog to the tango. Instrument instructions cover all the acoustic essentials plus the chapman stick and the lute. There's even a bar that offers early morning recitals from a range of poets. Heaven's above, there's a bar that never seems to close, where everyone—public and performers alike—jam 24 hours a day.

While the National books familiar names, too, (James Keelaghan, Gentoricum, Chris Smither, Eddi Reader, etc.) it also places a fair emphasis on the proponents of traditional Australian tunes and bush songs, which focus largely on the lives of rural agrarian workers. There are 152 or so acts on offer here. The one fly in the ointment, though, is an obvious lack of Aboriginal content. It fails to show up on our radar.

Most of our time allotted to the National we spend uncovering new talent. Amidst the massed ranks of performers we are completely tickled by the likes of Trouble In The Kitchen, Rooftop Revellers, The White-top Mountaineers, Cloudstreet, Handsome Young Strangers, and the editor's hands-down favourite, Chloe and Jason Rowth.

That's not to say we give short shrift to our Canadian colleagues, all of whom do brisk business in CD sales after superb sets.

Every budding singer-songwriter please take note: attending a Vin Garbutt concert is now mandatory before your first public performance. Garbutt is the undisputed master of communicating with an audience. Example: "Meat Loaf has turned vegetar-



Les Barker

ian, you know. He is now known as the Artist Formerly Known As Mince." A very funny man.

Eddi Reader proves to be in exceptionally fine form, too, as she runs through, essentially, her repertoire of Robert Burns songs. Which just leaves mention of the English poet Les Barker. Like Garbutt, Barker effortlessly gets your attention. His clever, clever use of words and wry sense of humour provide an ideal conclusion to a marvellous musical odyssey.

Well, almost. Cue our first sight of kangaroos hopping around a field on the outskirts of Canberra on our way out of the city. Now that, as Eddi Reader will tell you, is p-e-r-f-e-c-t.

As we fly home from Sydney a few days later, our plane takes us out over the Opera House and Watsons Bay. And down below, sitting on the edge of the turquoise water, we see the restaurant where we sat on a hot sunny day, ate and drank to our hearts' content, and watched the world go by.

G'day, mates.



The sessions that never end



Scott and Seth Avett

Universal Americana

The Avett Brothers rose out of the coffee houses of North Carolina to play the most prestigious festivals in the world. Iconic record producer Rick Rubin helped them get there. Mike Bell hears how.

There are few greater joys than discovering bigness in the small. A gesture. A phrase. A word. An idea. An emotion. They can all be slight, seemingly insignificant, but once you slip through the door, explore all the closets and anterooms and crawlspaces and attics you truly appreciate the grandeur and mass of what it all really means.

The subject and idea loom, fittingly, large during a conversation with Scott Avett, core member, banjo picker and fraternal bookend of the unassuming but acclaimed North Carolina trio the Avett Brothers.

He raises it casually, unconsciously, during an aside about the band's ceaseless summer tour, which has them taking their bluegrass-hued roots-pop across the continent, including a handful of anticipated Canadian dates, such as folk fest stops in Winnipeg, Calgary and Vancouver. It's a

seemingly daunting stretch with few opportunities for homestead pit stops, such as the one he's enjoying during this particular late May day.

"Well, yeah, it can look that way," Avett laughs about the never-ending itinerary. "I think it looks more that way to others. For me, I take it day by day and try not to think about July and August, and very little about June. I've taken this tour as it comes."

"And the way we've learned over the years to break it up is that a big part of what we are is the home time. More than just recharging our physical energy but for our mental ability to continue the writing process and the mentality that we strive to maintain—that's key for who we are."

"We work it out where we do bounce home for a regular basis even if it's just for three days."

A simple thing: home. But for Avett who, like his brother and bandmate Seth, is married, it holds a great deal more importance.

On a grander scale, home—where they came from and the community where they still reside—has informed the very music they make, and the decisions that have brought them to this point, making them a

growing contemporary folk concern that has been offered invitations to play every "it" event, from Coachella to Glastonbury to the Newport Folk Festival.

It's where the brothers kicked off their musical careers in the rock band Nemo before finally embracing their more rural upbringing in a sonic way a decade ago. In 2002, after a couple of years playing around N.C. with their acoustic Avett Brothers incarnation—made a trio with the addition of bassist Bob Crawford—they finally ventured from that home to road test the sound they were distilling, an Americana hybrid that recalls everyone from Guadalupe Diary and The Waterboys to Ben Folds Five, Steve Earle and The Jayhawks.

Since then, they've released more than a half-dozen albums and EPs, organically growing a fan base from the dust and dirt of every coffeehouse, rock club and soft-seat theatre they and their music have tilled.

Their latest recording, 2009's *I and Love and You*, has taken them to a whole new field, having been produced by iconic ear specialist Rick Rubin, who counts among his collaborators the Red Hot Chili Peppers, the Dixie Chicks, Tom Petty and, of course,

The Man in Black in his darkest, dullest twilight days.

The recording, the Avett Brothers' major label debut for Rubin's own American imprint, proves they belong among such heady company. It's a joyful yet not always joyous celebration of the profound pleasures of basic human emotions. It sounds like a melodic warehouse warmed by the natural sunlight of classic roots instrumentation and echoing with the ghosts of a life fully lived—easy to embrace because of the honesty of the sounds and, more important, because of the effortless spectrum of sentiments expressed by both brothers, who share crooning duties.

"Rick helped us so much in defining that boldness of the simple vocal line and it definitely makes it very dramatic and dark when it needs to be dark, and light when it needs to be light. And there's really no hocus-pocus to it or noise around it, except when you're down to trying to get it just right," says Avett, before adding: "It sounds very simple but it definitely takes a lot of work."

"I think that's probably true about those old Elvis recordings, you know? It's more than just his voice. You hear all of these great little things in these recordings—it was very masterfully done."

As is their latest creation. And, not surprisingly, *I and Love and You's* hard-earned simplicity met with a liplock from the press and more mainstream audiences, winding up on numerous year-end lists and selling upwards of 200,000 copies Stateside. It ultimately validated their notion that teaming with Rubin and making use of his name and major affiliations was the right move, despite the inherent risks of alienating a devoted fan base.

But Avett says it was a calculated risk—not only had they done their due diligence assuring complete artistic control, they also assumed the people who'd already joined them on their musical journey and had invested time and energy into it would trust them enough to know that what they were doing to take themselves to that next level was more complex than merely taking a blind swipe at the brass ring.

"I don't think growth is a bad thing," he says, putting the band's big league leap into proper perspective. "I don't think *Abbey Road* is any less awesome because it's massive. It blows my mind every time I listen

to it, I love it. So I keep that in mind and I also kept in mind that (what we've done) has been a gradual growth....

"As close as we have been, and are and continue to strive to be towards our fans, that is always a concern, because in a lot of ways we are here to serve them....

"And when we do something that on the surface may seem scary or, um," he pauses, "Let's see, mischievous or too big for them, you definitely hear it.... For this whole situation we believed surely that even if we made a terrible record we would learn so much from it that in the long run and the (big) picture of what we make as artists in this life would benefit from it. And that everybody—us and the fans—would be better for it.

"For my art, and for Seth and I, we drive the bus as far as what we write and what we feel, and we have to react to that, and this is a reaction to where we're at."

In fact, the title track of the album has been described by some, including Seth, as being a direct acknowledgment and concern of where the Avett Brothers are at in relation to their longtime fans. Steeped in loss and longing and featuring lines such as, "*Dumbed down and numbed by time and age / Your dreams that catch the world the cage / The highway sets the traveller's stage / All exits look the same,*" it has been read as a band acknowledging it's getting bigger with the distance between it and its audience growing greater.

But, not surprisingly, Scott says the song had its origins in a small idea that turned into a much, much bigger one. Or ones.

"It's funny, this is interesting, you're helping me think about this," Avett says. "The funny thing about this and the really dynamic and awesome thing that makes it more complex since it's been written—and it's brilliant, I love it. I wrote it about a very specific, intimate, personal dynamic between me and someone that I love and mutually they love me but the act of showing that or saying that has become awkward, and not exactly clear at all times. And that was it. That's what I wrote."

"And I saw it as a double meaning, it also could mean you question that you do love someone so it becomes harder to say. And I ended it. I said two meanings is enough for me to validate in a song, because I think that dynamic is good."

"Well Seth, a lot of times this happens, where one of us will write a song and bring it to the other, and the other one will bring a verse and you're thinking, 'That's great, but that's the third or fourth meaning and I have no idea what you're talking about.' But that's just the way he read it."

However you want to read it, it's but one jewel in a crown that the Avett Brothers are beginning to wear more comfortably—one they've earned and one they deserve.

In short, success.
A seemingly straightforward concept, no?
Well, no, of course not. Because it, like



The Avett Brothers



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Martha Wainwright

most things where the Avett Brothers are concerned, is a small idea that proves to be open to many interpretations and explorations.

"It's really confusing sometimes when I'm talking to someone about this idea of success," says Avett. "And the person may be speaking to me about, 'You must be this or that about success'. And I'm sitting there—and this has just crept in over the past couple of years—and I don't know that anybody has the same definition. For us it's been so key to define that personally and in a very intimate way."

"I've heard things that Bruce Springsteen has said about when he was young of how scared they were of big crowds because it meant the end of these times, and I can totally relate. Ours has gone very gradual... and the definition of success is redefined all the time for us and it acts as a protective mentality that you can't ever fail, because you define your success and you have to just remind people around you, 'We may not be thinking the same exact thing about success'."

"More crowds and more money and more this or just more may not always mean success, and as soon as you detach yourself from that I think that if it does come more it's coming natural and you're able to manage it better."

And, one would assume, appreciate just how big, or small, a thing it really is.

A Family Affair

Martha Wainwright's latest live disc literally evokes the spirit of Edith Piaf. Her current project includes covering the songs of Kate and Anna McGarrigle with her brother, Rufus. Tony Montague lends an ear.

The past year has been a rough ride for Martha Wainwright. In September the American-Canadian songwriter gave birth to a son two months prematurely and amid a great deal of anxiety. And in January her mother, Kate McGarrigle, one of the great icons of Canadian folk, succumbed to cancer. Wainwright still feels aftershocks from the loss, but the reality of changing diapers helps her deal with the grieving, as her new life starts coming into focus.

Songs are taking shape, but the emotions are still a bit too hot to handle. "I've landed on another planet, basically, into new real estate ownership, and a new mother, and motherless," says Wainwright, reached at her home in Brooklyn, N.Y. "Every time I pick up the guitar I end up in tears, so I'm going to wait awhile before writing. Because my songs are generally very personal I don't want to end up with too much of a boo-hoo story. I'm waiting for

my metaphor."

But Wainwright is certainly not in a hiatus as a musician. Last year, on the suggestion of producer Hal Willner, she recorded a live album of songs by French chanson legend Édith Piaf (1915-1963) with the long title *Sans Fusils, Ni Souliers A Paris: Martha Wainwright's Piaf Record*, released in Canada in April.

"Piaf is probably my favourite singer from when I was a kid," says Wainwright, who grew up in Quebec and spoke French at school. "For me the idea of making a record of her songs was daunting. Hal sent me over 200 of her songs. I can't say I got through all of them but I discovered many that needed to be heard. So a lot of the songs on the album are not that well-known."

"It's not only a dedication to Piaf but to her songwriters and the genres of music that she sang. Though she died young, she started young, so she worked over a long period of time. It moves through different decades and you can hear that."

Willner suggested to Wainwright that she should do a few shows in New York City to try out some of the material. "The performances were able to convey the foreign language to the audience, and also evoked the spirit of a lot of the songs, being street songs. Even in the studio Piaf would probably have sung them through once only."

The gigs convinced Wainwright to record live over the course of three shows in the Big Apple. "It allowed the album to be a little rough around the edges. Basically you're seeking spontaneity and the soul of the song versus the best vocal or whatever.

"I had a little costume on because I was filming it. I never intended to represent Piaf in any way as an actor, and I didn't do much research into her life. I just knew the songs, and I attacked them as a singer rather than an interpreter. But despite my attempts to separate myself, the minute I would start to sing, especially in the live settings, she'd show up in some way as a spirit in the room."

"I always felt that she was listening, and is listening, and basically I realize that the whole thing has been a completely selfish attempt to attach myself to Edith Piaf somehow," says Wainwright with a laugh. "Which was a sort of dream come true—or maybe a surreal dream come true."

Currently Wainwright is working on a

Tubthumping

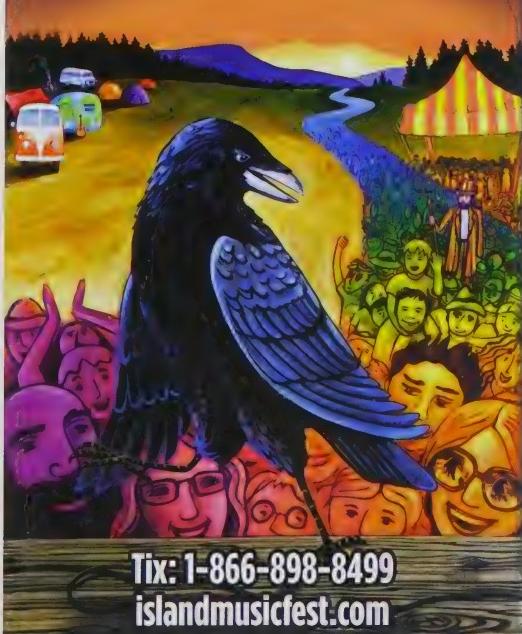
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very special family project. "I'm putting down some songs of my mother's that have never been recorded. It wouldn't be for a record of my own. My brother [Rufus Wainwright] and I have been talking for years about doing an album of Kate and Anna [McGarrigle] songs, and of having different artists do them, including ourselves.

"So that's a big thing," Wainwright continues. "And I've been involved in writing for a documentary film, *No Woman, No Cry*, by Christy Turlington [Burns], who was a famous fashion model in the '90s, about women around the world dying or potentially dying in labour because it's socially acceptable in a lot of male-driven societies to martyr yourself, and the importance of trying to get midwives to know how to do a c-section, or promote legal abortions in certain cases. All of this intense, crazy stuff."

Wainwright is also back on the road. In March she performed in Vancouver on a double bill with Quebec cellist/songwriter Jorane. It was a solo gig, with some songs by her mother or her father, the acerbically witty Loudon Wainwright III. But most of the material came from her self-titled 2005 debut album and its followup, *I Know You're Married But I've Got Feelings Too*. Such as *Bleeding All Over You*, *You Cheated Me*, and her classic *Bloody Mother Fucking Asshole* (inspired by Loudon).

"Single person with acoustic guitar is generally the best way to do things, I've noticed. As much as you want to bring all the production elements—and it can be fun—with moments of good jamming, I find that solo allows you to connect with the audience best and to see a song for what it really is."

What does Wainwright feel was the most important thing that her mother taught her as a songwriter? "I guess the one I hope to draw more from is all the research that she did, her interest in history and people.

"My songs have a tendency to be overly personal and emotional a lot of the time, which is fine, but I've always envied my mother's ability to connect her own views with historical events and images—she was an avid reader and a more-than-pseudo intellectual. So I hope she's climbing inside of me and trying to instill the same curiosity she had for history in life. I've never been as clever as she was. It's something I'm trying to take on."





Les Tireux d' Roches

Beyond The Fringe

Cheese graters and Jethro Tull play bit parts in Les Tireux d' Roches search for new approaches to timeless themes of war and recycling. Yves Bernard reckons they are the future sound of traditional music in Quebec.

Les Tireux d' Roches are completely at ease with the fact that their inspiration comes entirely from Quebec's traditional music. However, they remain on the fringes of that musical world. They hardly resemble any of the other acts they play alongside in song events and stand out even at traditional music festivals.

They are perhaps the only group not to have used the violin, and they have no plans to incorporate it anytime soon. Instead, they use flute, cello, saxophones and, most recently, the clarinet as they beat out their rhythms with world percussion and accentuate their melodies with harmonica, guitar, banjo and bouzouki.

Les Tireux have recently released *Cé qu'essé?*, an excellent album that will perhaps mark a turning point in Quebec traditional music for the decade to come. Featuring call-and-response songs, turluttes

and slowed-down reels, the album proves to have some very strong moments as it moves from laid back to tense, from sad to amusing, and from song to swing.

The opening track, *Quarts de clois*, with its carnivalesque orchestration, emphasizes the zaniness of the song and brings to mind not only brass bands but also a more melodic version of contemporary music.

Of all of Les Tireux' albums, *Cé qu'essé?* is the most swinging. This can be attributed to the participation of their new percussionist, David Robert, who has replaced singer-songwriter Francis D'Octobre as he pursues a solo career.

"Francis worked a lot more on the sound of the rhythms he created, whereas David has a more aggressive style of playing. He works with all kinds of different accessories in addition to the cajon and the djembe—in some pieces he even uses a cheese grater. He is a percussionist and not a drummer. He plays everything with his hands," explains the group's singer, guitarist and accordionist, Denis Massé.

The band's soloists add themselves to this very consistent swing, and they are a lot more present here than on their previous albums.

"The melodic lines of our pieces are often played by the harmonica, the accordion and the flute, but all of the musicians manage to find their place within the album," adds Denis.

The flute sometimes conjures up the progressive sound of groups like Jethro Tull. This analogy brings a smile to Denis.

"During practice, we treat ourselves to it even more. It's normal, we're all in our forties and we grew up on prog rock. But we are still constantly in search of new arrangements. We want to find detours in order to avoid the redundancy that reels and call-and-response songs can sometimes lead to."

With their voluntarily laid-back banjo, their improvising cello, their rich and sometimes dramatic vocal harmonies, their imitated tap-dancing and even with their kazoo, Les Tireux are easily recognizable from afar. However, lyrical weight is also one of the dominant traits that distinguish the group, as they are equally devoted to festive and socially minded songs.

"I have done a lot of song collecting and I have a very large repertoire of songs," Denis tells us. "But there are a lot more traditional groups and singers than there were before and it is becoming more difficult to find treasures that haven't been recorded by someone else. So we compose around traditional themes; that way people who aren't so familiar with the area won't know whether the tunes are old or not."

Certain songs touch upon timeless themes such as war and recycling. Others are inspired by experience. Such is the case

Tubthumping

for *Ti-Fo Bouteille* and *Hommage à la Bol...duc*, a song that tells the story of a man who collects bottles.

"He was a character from our childhood. We were all a little bit scared of him, but we made fun of him whenever we were all together," laughs Denis.

When Les Tireux first got started, their repertoire contained more storytelling than songs, and they performed with the now famous Fred Pellerin of Sainte-Élie-de-Caxton. For their first concerts, they researched and put together numbers according to each village they visited, studying the phone book in order to find out the last names of the village's inhabitants and taking role call at the beginning of each concert.

Since then, the music has gained in importance within their repertoire while the stories have gotten shorter.

"It's because of the demand, but we have always found it important to have something to say. In the end, more and more of our songs tell stories, and more and more of the stories are related to the songs. This has

occurred progressively and unconsciously," explains the singer-researcher. Despite all this, a story can be heard hidden before the opening track on *Cé qu'essé*.

Throughout the course of the disc, the band uses the Quebecois language with assertion. In the text that accompanies *Hommage à la Bol...duc*, Denis writes: "I am telling you; as long as I live I will always say moé and toé [instead of moi and toi]. I speak as they did in the old days. I'm not ashamed of my ancestors."

It is a stance that he defends in this interview: "We need to assume the fact that we are different, in our language, our accents and our expressions. That's what accounts for some of our success when we play in Europe. During our concerts, it becomes a game. The audience sometimes reacts to a single word, and the concert is built upon that connection."

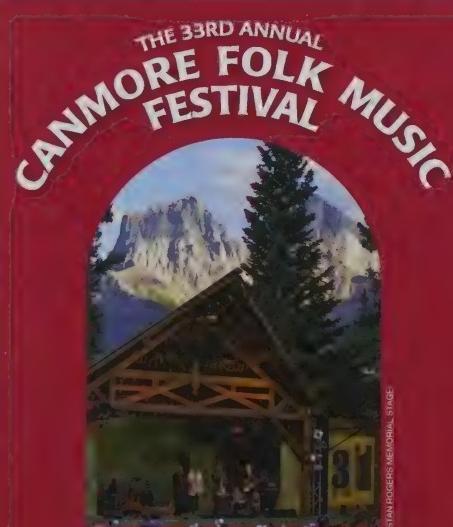
And connecting with audiences is indeed what they have been doing. They played in France last May, where they will soon return for an even bigger tour, and they



vow to play more often in Quebec during the summer. As this goes to print, there was talk of them playing not only the big stage at Montreal's Saint-Jean Baptiste celebration in Maisonneuve Park but also Mariposa and other important events.

The road has required them to add upright bassist Sébastien Saleciti to the group. "We wanted to have a bigger sound for bigger stages," says Denis. But bass or no bass, the band will have a hard time dissimilating the sensibility of their arrangements.

Translated by Jane Ehrhardt



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The New Nu Folk

Colin Irwin wades through a baffling litany of terms describing the superb acoustic-based music currently coming out of West London. Cue Noah and the Whale, Laura Marling and Mumford & Sons, just for starters.

Strange things are happening in Britain. Well, strange things have always been happening in Britain but recently the whole weird and wonderful thing we call folk music has been turned on its head by an irrepressible surge of young artists from all corners of the musical divide who've found themselves labelled under the increasingly blurry banner of the f-word.

This is, of course—and always has been—an impossibly contentious topic when it comes to definitions. People have been arguing about what constitutes folk music for more than a century and those arguments/debates/full-scale wars have never been more heated, baffling and pointless than they are now as the music becomes more and more fragmented with the emergence of a myriad of peculiar sub-genres from nu folk and psych folk to folk noir, folktronica and, my favourite, fairy folk. What do they all mean? Heaven

only knows, but after decades when outing yourself as a folk fan was to invite the sort of ridicule only previously reserved for trainspotters and traffic wardens, it has helped create a quiet revolution that's attracted a deluge of young artists and audiences.

Many of these have emerged from what most people regard as the conventional folk movement, built around folk clubs and festivals, the source of a new generation of artists from Rachel Unthank and Jim Moray to Seth Lakeman, Benji Kirkpatrick and Jackie Oates, who've re-invigorated traditional roots with innovative ideas and boundless energy. Add to this a lively conveyor belt emerging from the traditional music courses in Newcastle, now producing a steady stream of gifted and imaginative young artists like Emily Portman, Jim Causley, Dogan Mehmet, Rachael McShane, Jonny Kearney and Lucy Farrell and you have some exciting talent, particularly when adding other new young names like the duo Megson, the young band Tyde and hugely promising songwriters Nancy Wallace, Megan Henwood and Sam Carter, and the Brit folk has been regenerated in impressive fashion.

Yet what's making the music so unpredictable and interesting at the moment is the number of artists with no family background, formal training or even more than a

rudimentary knowledge of the existing folk world, who've been making a considerable dent in mainstream circles and are quite happy to acknowledge the folk tag foisted on them. They include two of the hottest new bands of the last couple of years, Noah and the Whale and Mumford & Sons, both with major label deals, both heavily reliant on acoustic instrumentation and bold choruses, both terrific live acts, both displaying an impressive sense of roots and both closely linked to perhaps the most spectacularly talented star of this brave new world of folk—Laura Marling.

Marling was at one point a member of Noah and the Whale, while Whale main man Charlie Fink produced her brilliant debut album *Alas, I Cannot Swim*. Mumford & Sons, who have soared at a frantic rate to dizzy heights all around the world with their boisterous debut album *Sigh No More*, appeared with Marling so regularly they seemed joined at the hip and were effectively her backing band at one point, while Laura and Marcus Mumford are—or have been—romantically linked. As were Laura and Charlie Fink. There were close connections, too, between Noah and the Mumfords, with various members attending the same schools in West London and often gigging together.

The careers of all three are intertwined and when you add in other similarly aged

Tubthumping



Emmy the Great

acts like charismatic poet/actor/troubadour Johnny Flynn, indie bands Mystery Jets, The Maccabees and Peggy Sue and quirky singer-songwriters Emmy the Great and Alessi's Ark (who supported Marling on her recent U.K. tour), all playing at one another's gigs and appearing on one another's records, it all begins to sound a bit incestuous. Even worse, it sounds like a ... movement. Cue more befuddled music journalists attempting to coin a ridiculous, zany, catch-all, sound-bite phrase to capture

the moment. And the winner is ... Thamesbeat. Like Merseybeat, see, except they all come from or have gravitated to the banks of the Thames in West London.

It would all be laughable, except that, without exception, all the artists are superb and, while hardly fitting most of the normal reference points we have become accustomed to draping around folk musicians, they all have a penchant for acoustic instrumentation, graphic story songs and a fiercely independent spirit that sets them significantly apart from the mainstream music industry. Noah and the Whale, Laura Marling and Mumford & Sons have all played the Cambridge Folk Festival with enthusiastic results from all concerned and while all three of them are signed to major labels and thus tend to be aimed at young, mostly rock audiences, there's a rebellious edge to them all that finds them closer to the DIY ideals of folk song than any of the marketing devices and promotional shenanigans that are second nature to the pop industry.

One of the most enduring images of Laura

Marling is her reaction to being nominated for the Mercury Music Prize in 2008 for her *Alas, I Cannot Swim* album. At the shortlist announcement, she beguiled everyone with a heart-stopping rendition of the haunting opening track *Ghosts* before being wheeled in front of the assembled mass of press hacks for ritual interviews and photographs. The small, blonde Laura took one look at the banks of camera lenses being pointed at her face, turned on her heel and fled for the hills.

She was just 18 then and most people assumed that shyness had got the better of her, but there was more to it than that—she just didn't want to play the game. Everything about her is natural. She sings, writes and behaves instinctively and anyone doubting her strength of character should take a closer listen to the topics she writes about—depression, mental health, sex, emotional breakdown—so unflinchingly. She may have been tender of years but leaving home to live off her music in London at the age of 16 moulded an artist and personality of formidable principles and

rufus wainright, calgary folk music festival, july 2007

LET THE MUSIC TAKE YOU

Tubthumping

idealism and behaving like a performing seal just wasn't in her DNA. It may be hard to equate that with a diminutive figure who writes with such subtle maturity and sings with elegant purity, but her determination to make a stand against the shallowness of the music industry was so embedded that she habitually appeared on stage wearing unflattering men's clothes and even refused to wear make-up on television shows. "I didn't want it to be about my looks," she said. "That was my stance and I'm very proud I adopted it."

These days, with two successful albums under her belt, she's much more assured and pragmatic about such things while her commanding presence on stage is extraordinary. She must be sick of hearing people going on about how young she is but watching a packed audience hanging on her every word as she made self-effacing introductions before unleashing her mysterious, but potently elegiac songs about the human condition at the grand London Palladium earlier this year, it is hard to believe she's still only 20.

Noah and the Whale have had their battles, too. Charlie Fink has a similarly robust sense of independence, attempting to take on the might of iTunes to prevent people downloading individual tracks from the band's second album, *The First Days of Spring*, to protect the careful sequencing and fragile intensity of a painfully constructed concept album depicting his emotional meltdown after the breakup of a relationship. To add further poignancy to the Marling-Noah-Mumford connection, it transpires that the meltdown Fink was so traumatically depicting on his songs on the album was his own relationship with Laura Marling (though both sides insist they remain firm friends). The fact that, after the jollity of the summer hit *Five Years Time*, he and his band should attempt such an ambitious and unerringly dark project at a crucial stage in a career on the brink of achieving mass audience acceptance is itself indicative of an amazing, free spirit—and possibly commercial suicide.

"I feel like the naughty kid in class," says Fink of his battle with iTunes (which he



Laura Marling

ultimately lost). "The music industry is in such a mess at the moment I feel we're doing the right thing by concentrating on the music being artistic—commercialism isn't

A dark, grainy photograph of a large crowd of people at a concert, with many hands raised and glowing screens or phones held up, creating a sea of light.

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the most important thing."

Marling has a similar outlook. Bemoaning the iPod generation of which she is a central part, having initially attracted widespread attention through her tracks on YouTube and MySpace. "I am part of the iPod generation and I can't stand it. People don't appreciate music anymore," she says. "They don't adore it. They don't buy vinyl. They love their laptops but they don't love a record for its sound quality and its artwork. I love getting an album and reading the notes and the thank-you's and the artwork and I think it really has an effect on how you interpret or feel about an album. It's sad you can't have that special feeling when you're buying an album off the Internet."

It may not be a fully blown concept album in the manner of Noah and the Whale's *The First Days of Spring*, but her new one, *I Speak Because I Can*, comprehensively tackles the pain of becoming an adult and the difficult acceptance of responsibility.

"I loved being part of Noah and the Whale because there was just no pressure," she says. "I didn't write the songs so there was no pressure—I just got to stand back and watch these amazing songs come out and I loved it. The solo thing is more scary ... but a little more exciting."

She's uncomfortable trying to explain or analyze her own songs: "My songs are not pretty, some are depressing ... stream of consciousness really." But that's part of her magnetism. She's a truly beautiful singer and the hidden depths and shrouded sense of bleakness in her lyrics keeps you guessing ... and keeps you listening.

Lacing their songs with rampaging banjo, Mumford & Sons have also defiantly followed their own noses without paying much heed to music industry expectations or protocol. Their first EP was recorded on their own terms before they got a record deal, the finely crafted result of a slow, natural evolution that climaxed with last year's breakthrough album *Sigh No More*, produced by Markus Dravas, famous for his work with Arcade Fire. Rejecting the usual big promo party, they chose to launch the album with a hoedown in a barn, emphasizing a maverick charm typified by the importance to their musical style of Winston



Noah And The Whale

Marshall's banjo, which is used as a kind of surrogate rhythm section in the absence of drums. As a result, bluegrass often gets mentioned as a reference point. They don't know about that, but happily acknowledge the banjo's importance in establishing the distinctive individuality of a sound that somehow merges rugged acoustic roots with good-time rock.

"It's at the heart of everything," says Mums' Ted Dwane. "The banjo gives our music a lot of its momentum, a lot of its energy. We'd be lost without it. If you don't look after your sound how can you maintain your integrity?"

Indeed. The Marling-Mumford-Noah triumvirate isn't exactly a movement and isn't exactly folk music but their lives and careers criss-crossed at a key point when they had similar influences. Charlie Fink, Laura Marling and Marcus Mumford were all exposed at young ages to the songwriting of Bob Dylan and Joni Mitchell and the folk-rockery of Fairport Convention and, after assembling together to play and socialize on the same West London acoustic scene, they were all knocked sideways by the so-called anti-folk sounds coming out of New York, courtesy of Bonnie Prince Billy, Jeffrey Lewis, Nina Nastasia and Diane Cluck. If there's a commonality about them, it's the galvanizing effect Bonnie Prince Billy and his acolytes had on them all. They're not unique in this, as it happened to several other leading lights of the new extended

Brit folk world—notably the enigmatic Scottish singer-songwriter Alasdair Roberts and the trailblazing band Trembling Bells, led by former avant-garde drummer Alex Nielson with classically trained singer and harpist Lavinia Blackwall.

None of them objects unduly to the folk tag. Noah and the Whale say they feel honoured whenever they're aligned to the folk tradition and even the forthright Laura Marling has no problem with the term folksinger. "I don't mind it, it's nicer than singer-songwriter—I hate the term singer-songwriter," says Marling and *Rambling Man*, perhaps the most striking song on her new album *I Speak Because I Can*, has all the hallmarks of a modern folk classic.

Mumford & Sons demur slightly whenever the folk tag is foisted on them, but only because they don't think they've earned it.

"Folk is a genre steeped in tradition and incredible musicianship," says Ben Lovett. "We're just four lads making the music we all love; there isn't much high art to it. I do think folk music suffers from a lack of recognition because at the core of folk music is songwriting. Lyrics, melody, harmony. Elements that are key to a good song that have perhaps been lost in recent years."

Perhaps lost no longer. More than any foolish attempts to categorize them, such qualities are what make the emergence of Mumford & Sons, Noah and the Whale and Laura Marling such an important and gratifying development.

Tubthumping



City To City

Delhi 2 Dublin perform an irresistible mash of dance music laced with Celtic and Bhangra. Their intensely physical musical border-hopping around Planet Electric startles our Patrick Langston.

Sure, sure, says Tarun Nayar, tabla and electronics man with Vancouver's Delhi 2 Dublin, the band is career-oriented. They want to sell lots of albums, play bigger and bigger festivals, make lots of money. "You have to humour your managers and publicists by saying that. And money is important. But really, my goal is to party and have fun."

That estimable party and fun goal—as you'll know if you've heard *Planet Electric*, the irresistible new album by this five-member outfit—is precisely what this mashed-up bunch achieves musically. Gathering electronica and world beat into one rowdy big top, they fuse Punjabi and Celtic, accenting the mix with reggae, hip-hop and pretty much anything else that strikes their fancy. The result is joyous. Unexpected. Energizing.

"The only thing we consciously set out to do is to move people," continues Nayar on the phone from Hong Kong where, at the end of May, the band played four showcases at the mammoth Asian music

conference Music Matters. "That often ends up happening out on the dance floor."

That DJ-like, spontaneous combustion Nayar and company spark among dancers echoes the band's genesis. Just three years old, they originally teamed up for a one-off performance during Vancouver's 2006 Celtic Fest. Audience and band members alike were instantly enthralled with the collaboration, and within a year Delhi 2 Dublin were in Ottawa, opening Canada Day celebrations before 40,000 people on Parliament Hill. (The event included a handshake from Prime Minister Stephen Harper, whom Nayar, not a man to keep opinions to himself, called a "dickhead" in a subsequent interview, while allowing that it was pretty cool to meet the PM).

Since then, they've played everywhere from the Vancouver Olympics to SXSW in Austin, TX. Their self-titled debut release hit No. 3 on the Canadian Chart Attack world music charts. *Planet Electric*, whose title pretty much sums up the band's music, is their second album of new material. It features, along with Nayar, Kyatami on fiddle, Sanjay Seran on vocals, Andrew Kim on electric sitar and guitar, and Ravi Binning on dhol, a double-headed barrel drum whose popularity in India dates back to the 15th century.

And while the band is clearly having a blast with what they're doing, they're also very obviously good at what they do.

They've found the balance between fun and professionalism while creating a sound that's at once intensely physical and musically substantial.

You can hear plenty of that balance live this summer, by the way: Delhi 2 Dublin are playing festivals across Canada and touring below the border.

Onstage, says fiddler Kyatami from Hong Kong, the music translates into something special. "I love that it is a positive thing and I get to share my gift with people. Also, because it's an instrument and there is no language barrier, I can communicate with people no matter where they come from. Music is energy and there's no better feeling than when you can get everyone in a room feeling the same thing and forgetting about all their inhibitions from the outside world."

Asked if there's a musician she most admires, Kyatami answers in a way befitting a genre-bending artist in a world where multiculturalism and cross-fertilization is the new normal: she loves everyone from Guns 'n' Roses' Slash ("an insanely great technical player, he's got awesome style plus he's passionate but hardcore") to Yo-Yo Ma ("he stepped out of the boundaries of the classical realm to collaborate and compose his own music with an eclectic group of artists").

For the unsuspecting listener, especially one schooled in popular music of the 1960s and '70s, Delhi 2 Dublin's cheeky, free-as-

sociation fusing of such diverse genres can at first startle (boomer alert: surprise is a good thing).

"To me, it sounds normal, I'm so inside it," says Nayar. "It can make some people not take you seriously. Bhangra heads think the only thing that matters is Bhangra. Hip-hop, metal heads: it's the same. But if I was serious all the time, I wouldn't be in a Bhangra-Celtic band."

The success of *Planet Electric* lies in part with the inspired mixing by Diamond (DJ Swami) Duggal, known for his work with the likes of Apache Indian and Maxi Priest. It takes one kind of skill to mix a country or folk album, where melody and lyrics are usually the focus, and quite another to tackle something where coherence hinges often on the mix of beats (one listen to *Laughing Buddha*, a bilingual and musical border-hopping call to live vigorously, will clue you in to exactly what intelligent mixing can do).

"You have to be comfortable with Indian music and electronica, and put that together with a poppy beat," says Nayar. "Also, the mix is important because it lets you play the record on laptop speakers. Swami is the only guy in the world who could do it."

Not ones to worry overly about convention, Delhi 2 Dublin road-tested the songs in concert before committing them to the album. None of this dramatic stuff about allowing only a couple of sneak, live previews before the big release date. All of which suggests that the band, by checking out audience response before recording the songs, is a little more marketing-savvy than it might appear.

They also huddled in a 10-day writers' retreat, with some surprising results. Nayar's song *Tommy*, for example, morphed radically when fiddle and voice were added, he says.

"We were at day five or six, and had hit the wall when it was time to work on *Tommy*. At first, it was this epic tune with a drum and bass track. No vox, no weird key changes. It wound up nothing like what we started with. I write a lot of music, and you get really attached to your stuff. I had to totally let it go, but I can say it's now much better."

As to guiding principles in the band's music and performances, he says simply, "There's a certain feeling in our songs: elation, happiness, raw, crazy, wild, energy, cultures meeting."



Mariposa at Fifty

Once the most innovative folk festival in North America, Mariposa fell on hard times during the '90s only to resurrect itself in the past decade. Roddy Campbell provides a potted history of a turbulent half century.

Mariposa, Canada's iconic folk festival, celebrates its 50th anniversary in July. Now that's worth a toast or two. And I'll tell you why.

Founded amidst the first flush of the early '60s urban folk revival, it grew into one of the key events of its kind in North America, certainly the most influential. Without Mariposa, Winnipeg, Vancouver, Edmonton and Calgary folk festivals would not exist. Yet Mariposa barely survived the fog end of the last century as it shuffled from pillar to post around southern Ontario, seeking financial salvation and a significant audience, only to land back at its original location, Orillia, at the outset of 2000.

It's been a roller-coaster of a ride all right, but in the past decade the festival has resurrected itself due to a core of devoted, big-hearted volunteers.

"Mariposa was fading away to almost

nothing in the last few years of the '90s," says its current artistic director, Mike Hill. "Once it got back to Orillia there's been a steady increase in attendance and maybe influence, too. Serena [Ryder] went from playing a showcase here to being our headliner this year on Saturday night."

It was all so different back in 1961. With support from the local chamber of commerce, the town council provided the initial financial backing in order to attract more tourists to the area. Named as a tribute to former resident Stephen Leacock (whose fictitious town of Mariposa, in the satire *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town*, was clearly a caricature of Orillia), the first event featured an all-Canadian bill with the likes of Alan Mills, Edith Fowke, Helen Creighton, Jean Carignan and Ian and Sylvia.

While an artistic success, by all accounts, it lost \$4,300 and was immediately in danger of folding. Festival directors Casey and Ruth Jones took out a second mortgage on their home to cover some of the debts. No arts funding existed for folk festivals back then. To continue, Mariposa needed serious seed money. Toronto entrepreneur Jack Wall, who owned the Fifth Peg coffee house, offered a solution. He paid two dollars for the rights to stage the next festival but retained the original board to approve

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expenditures and the lineup.

In 1963, Mariposa sold 8,000 advance weekend tickets. Many more punters turned up. Trouble broke out—petty acts of vandalism and theft—on the Saturday night. The festival blamed local drunken louts. The town pointed its finger at the folk festival. Whatever, when the dust finally settled Mariposa was banished from Orillia.

To make matters worse, Jack Wall disappeared. So, too, did an estimated \$20,000 in ticket revenue, which left the board with a \$9,000 debt. But cometh the hour, cometh the man. Orillia-born, Toronto-based radio disc jockey Randy Ferris convinced the board to stay the course. More important still, he talked Estelle Klein into becoming the artistic director.

Klein, a member of the grassroots Toronto Guild of Canadian Folk Artists, publicized concerts, ran hootenannies and organized and negotiated with the likes of the Toronto Musician's Association to set a standard wage scale for folk musicians performing in coffee houses. Trusted and endeared by local performers, she became their unofficial and unpaid agent. Still, she took some convincing to join Mariposa.

As Klein told me in 1994, while researching *Playing The Field: The History of the Edmonton Folk Music Festival*: "Oh, I was horrible to [Ferris]. I said, 'You don't know anything about folk music... He just knew commercial music and I was a religious zealot... For some reason he convinced

me. I came to believe he really cared and I agreed to take it on for some minimal honorarium."

Klein transformed Mariposa as an artistic entity. She did away with its all-Canadian policy. She also expanded the scope of the music by booking such acoustic blues performers as Mississippi John Hurt, Skip James, and Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee, as well as the bluegrass combo the Greenbriar Boys.

Not only that, Klein paid each act union scale plus expenses. That rate stood at all Canadian festivals until Edmonton scrapped it in the mid-'80s.

"There was no arguing that scale," said Klein. "I wanted to have James Taylor one year and his manager told me that he was getting \$20,000 the next week to play the Hollywood Bowl. I said, 'Then he can afford to do Mariposa.' So James Taylor said he'd come for one day for \$78 plus his airfare and hotel. And I said, 'Great.' It turned out he showed up on the Friday unexpectedly and he just hung around all weekend. That was very common."

While the festival moved from Orillia to Toronto, to Innis Lake, and then back to Toronto by 1968, it grew in stature to the point it attracted such personalities as Pete Seeger, Bill Monroe and Ramblin' Jack Elliott. It also provided up-and-coming songwriters Joni Mitchell, Leonard Cohen and Bruce Cockburn with their first major exposure.

Under Klein's meticulous supervision,



Estelle Klein

workshops grew more and more sophisticated. Indeed, for the first time at any North American folk festival, she brought together diverse cultures to swap songs and share their instrumental expertise. The accepted format until then consisted of bluesmen playing at blues workshops or gospel singers harmonizing at gospel workshops and never the twain did meet.

"I have always had a strong social conscience, and I have always worked with people of all backgrounds and levels," said Klein. "The business of human relationships in folk music I'm sure is what appealed to me."



Photo: Anne Wodrow/with
Winston Fitzgerald, Aly Bain, Tom Anderson and Willie Johnston



A Year of Folk Festivals

Ontario 2010

Une Année des Festivals Folks



JUNE / juin

June/juin - September/septembre

Harbourfront Centre Summer Events

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June 16 - 19 juin

Skeleton Park Music Festival

- Kingston

www.skeletonparkmusicfestival.ca



SKELETON PARK
MUSIC FESTIVAL

June 18 - 20 juin

Tottenham Bluegrass Festival – Tottenham

www.tottenhambluegrass.ca



June 25 - 27 juin

City Roots Festival

- Toronto

www.torontocityroots.com



JULY / juillet

July 6 - 18 juillet

Cisco Ottawa Bluesfest

- Ottawa

www.ottawabluesfest.ca



July 8 - 11 juillet

TD Sunfest – London

www.sunfest.on.ca



July 9 - 11 juillet

Canterbury Folk Festival

- Ingersoll

www.canterburyfolkfestival.on.ca

July 9 - 11 juillet

Mariposa Folk Festival – Orillia

www.mariposafolk.com



July 9 - 11 juillet

Northern Lights Festival Boréal – Sudbury

www.nlfbsudbury.com



July 16 - 18 juillet

Festival du Loup

- Lafontaine

www.festivalduloup.on.ca



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Tubthumping



Bob Dylan: 1971

Photo: L. Cherkoff

Controversially, she did away with mainstage concerts in 1971, partially to discourage gate crashers—a fad that grew in the aftermath of Woodstock—but also to provide a more suitable platform for subtle acts like unaccompanied traditional singers. That year, Neil Young, Joni Mitchell, Jackson Brown and Bob Dylan turned up as unexpected guests. Such was the pull of Mariposa in its heyday.

A young Mitch Podolak witnessed Klein's achievements first hand. He paid close attention to details, and when he put the first Winnipeg Folk Music Festival together in 1974, he literally reproduced a Mariposa.

"Mariposa was the cultural model I used," says Podolak. "That style of [multi-faceted] workshops reached their height during Estelle's time. She was my teacher. It's fun

watching workshops today that people stole from me. But I stole them from Estelle. We always had a good laugh about that."

Podolak would use the same Mariposa model when founding the Vancouver Folk Music Festival and overseeing the beginning of the Edmonton and Calgary festivals.

Estelle Klein left Mariposa for health reasons in 1980. She died in 2004, aged 74.

Within two years of her leaving Mariposa, its finances were decimated largely due to severe rain in 1981. It was cancelled the following year. While briefly rejuvenated in Barrie through sponsorship from Molson Breweries from 1984 to 1990, bad luck, bad judgment and poor attendance reduced Mariposa to a one-day event in the Toronto neighbourhood of Parkdale by 1999.

Meanwhile, back in Orillia, city officials came full circle. Councillors Tim Lauer and Don Evans, along with local folk enthusiast Gord Ball, approached the Mariposa Folk Foundation about the prospect of relocating the festival to its original home, Orillia.

Their timing was perfect.

The first summer back in Orillia, Mariposa recruited 400 volunteers. That number has since grown to 600 and includes the staff.

"Every single position is volunteered," says Mike Hill. "We have no paid employees. There is one person in particular, her name is Bernie Haley, and she has gone into the office every single day, and I mean Saturdays and Sundays as well, and she sits there and treats it as her job to be, if not the face of Mariposa, at least the person who answers the phone."

Mariposa's artistic budget is now a modest but stable \$200,000, which Bell has overseen for the past four years. More



Mike Hill

recent lineups include about 45 acts, which attract a total audience for three days of around 20,000. And while the 2010 bill includes a broad spectrum of contemporary and traditional folk and roots acts, it will also feature some familiar faces from the glory years.

"Sunday night, that will be our big celebration," says Hill. "We have [Gordon] Lightfoot, Sylvia Tyson, Ian Tyson—they won't sing together; I think I would have to spend all my artistic budget to get them to do that. We have Murray McLauchlan on Sunday night, too. Those people all have long histories with Mariposa. ... Oscar Brand is going to be there. I think he was on the second bill. And Pete Seeger is going to do a tribute video for us. I tried to book him."

"Lightfoot has been very generous with us. In 2000, when we came back he said he would headline for us. Whenever you have Lightfoot in Orillia you are bound to get a good crowd. So that certainly helped us get back on our feet."





A Year of Folk Festivals

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JULY / juillet

July 16 - 18 juillet

**Home County
Folk Festival** – London
www.homecounty.ca



July 16 - 18 juillet

Stewart Park Festival
– Perth
www.stewartparkfestival.ca



July 23 - 25 juillet

Hillside Festival – Guelph
www.hillsidefestival.ca



Bienvenue!



July 23-31 juillet

**Twisted Pines
Music & Arts**
– Penetanguishene
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AUGUST / août

July 30 juillet - August 1 août
**Blue Skies Music
Festival** – Clarendon Station
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August 13 - 15 août

**Fergus Scottish
Festival and Highland
Games** – Fergus
www.fergusscottishfestival.com



July 30 juillet - August 1 août
**The Mill Race
Festival of Traditional
Folk Music** – Cambridge
www.millracefolksociety.com



August 13 - 15 août

**Ottawa Folk
Festival** – Ottawa
www.ottawafolk.org



August 6 - 8 août
**Goderich Celtic
Roots Festival** – Goderich
www.celticfestival.ca



August 13 - 15 août

**Trout Forest
Music Festival** – Ear Falls
www.troutfest.com



August 6 - 8 août
**Live From the Rock
Folk Festival** – Red Rock
www.livefromtherock.com



August 20 - 22 août

**35th Summerfolk
Music & Crafts
Festival** – Owen Sound
www.summerfolk.org



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Slavic Soul Party

A Mighty Wind

A string of innovative North American Balkan brass bands continues to revitalize a tradition sometimes seen as sacred. Karl Magi has a word with the principal architects and discovers: "Tradition is stoking the fire, not praying over the ashes."

The rousing thunder of the big bass drum and the deep boom of the tubas underpin searing trumpet and saxophone solos. The complex rhythms and manic energy that make Balkan music so dynamic seem to be infecting a whole new generation of young musicians and music lovers in North America.

Matt Moran is the leader of Slavic Soul Party! They are an upbeat, energetic and talented band from Brooklyn that combines soul, funk and traditional Balkan brass band music into a fresh fusion of old and new.

Slavic Soul Party! was born from Moran's desire to diverge from the strictly traditional music he was playing with Balkan musicians. He wanted to make music that respected its roots while exploring other

avenues of musical expression.

Brass Menazeri is another band that has deep respect for the roots of the music while incorporating the diverse influences of all the sounds around it. Peter Jaques leads the band.

If there is one band that is responsible for bringing the tradition of Balkan brass band music alive in America it is Zlatne Uste. Co-founded more than 20 years ago by Michael Ginsburg and a group of other musicians, the band helped start the Balkan wave in New York City. This band could be considered one of the progenitors of Balkan music in America.

Each of these bands travels the same road of Balkan brass in a variety of different ways and each bandleader has his own story of what inspired him to get into the music.

Moran's initial inspiration to play Balkan music came from hearing the Bulgarian Women's Choir while he was a student at Berklee College of Music. "There was something to me about the passion and the sense of tensile strength and importance that was in the music," Moran says. This started a process that eventually lead to the discovery of Balkan brass music that

Moran says, "knocked me out."

Ginsburg first became interested in Balkan music through Balkan folk dancing. He joined a workshop on Balkan brass music one weekend and got hooked. His first introduction to the music was playing accordion but Ginsburg says he had so much fun playing the trumpet in the band that he took it up.

As a musician, Ginsburg points out a few reasons he's so taken with Balkan music. "The rhythms are very interesting and very mathematical. I'm drawn to the way the melodies punch out the rhythms. It is also just great dance music."

Jaques found inspiration to play the music after he attended a Balkan brass band workshop given by Ginsburg. He'd already been exposed to Turkish music and he found the parallels between Balkan brass and the traditional makam scales used in Ottoman Turkish music striking.

Musically, Jaques was drawn in by complex time signatures of Balkan music. His teenage interest in prog rock and its odd time signatures prepared him for the Balkan sound but he adds, "In Balkan music there are these weird rhythms but they really groove. You aren't proud of yourself for be-



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AUGUST / août

August 27 - 29 août

Eaglewood

Folk Festival - Pefferlaw

www.eaglewoodfolk.com



August 27 - 29 août

Peterborough Folk

Festival - Peterborough

www.ptbofolkfest.ca



SEPTEMBER / septembre

August 31 août - September 6 septembre

Ashkenaz Festival

- Toronto

www.ashkenazfestival.com



September 3 - 5 septembre

Shelter Valley

Folk Festival - Grafton

www.sheltervalley.com



September 23 septembre - October 3 octobre

Small World Music Festival - Toronto

www.smallworldmusic.com



OCTOBER / octobre

October 14 - 17 octobre

The Ontario Council of Folk Festivals

Annual Conference - Ottawa

www.ocff.ca



2011

February 18 - 21 février 2011

Winterfolk Roots and Blues

Festival - Toronto

www.winterfolk.com



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Tubthumping



Zlatne Uste

ing able to count them, you're actually just bouncing in time without really thinking."

Moran expresses the passion and the sheer level of dedication required to play this music. "It is such an uneconomical thing to do. The only reason people do it is for love."

Jaques adds that the music has always been responsive to the musical influences around it, even in the Balkans historically. "All of that music and all of those band leaders that have come up through history, they were playing with the music they heard around them. For example, they started hearing mariachi music in the '50s, so that crept into the music. It's always been the kind of music that brings in whatever appeals."

Each of the band leaders adds their reasons for the explosion in popularity with listeners. Moran points out that the music eschews the "school uniform of electric guitar." He adds that the Internet and digital distribution has helped people find out about the music and gain interest in a more grassroots way.

Another reason for the growth in popularity is its rhythmic quality, says Ginsburg. "Balkan music has a really strong percussion that creates a very easy beat for people to want to move to. Once you've cracked through the fact that it's a little exotic it's also very familiar. It's got a real dance groove to it!"

There are two related cultural factors that Ginsburg sees as having launched the Balkan wave. The first is the popularity of Emir Kusturica's movies. Kusturica is a Serbian director whose films are popular

with fans of art movies. "These movies have caught on as a sort of a subculture. There's been a niche for these movies and they featured brass band music as the primary soundtrack and that's one major influence," Ginsburg says.

The other influence Ginsburg mentions is Goran Bregovic, a Yugoslavian composer who was responsible for much of the music in Kusturica's movies. For Ginsburg, it was Bregovic's ability to package the music in a way that appealed to international audiences that helped arouse interest in Balkan brass bands.

The historical realities faced by expat Balkan communities are another reason Moran cites for the explosion in popularity. "This is what happened at the end of a period where people from the Balkans just liked to say they were European," Moran says. "You didn't talk about where you were from. There were a lot of horrible, hard things going on."

Moran points out that a positive response to the music and culture was an antidote to all of the negativity surrounding the region.

A clear illustration of the surging popularity of the Balkan sound is New York's Golden Festival. Ginsburg, who helped create the festival, says it started because there was no real place for musicians to play Balkan music 25 years ago.

"We only knew of two other bands that played this kind of music. At the time having more than one band was a big deal," he says.

Golden Festival has expanded tremendously since those humble beginnings of three bands with 100 people in the audience. Ginsburg feels the growth of Golden Festival has been due to grassroots support for the music.

"Bands would come to play and their clientele would come due to word of mouth." He says that in the last several years there has been an explosion in the festival attendance. "To the point that there were 1,000 people and 40 bands there. All of the venues have been completely packed!"

This has all been achieved without advertising, which Ginsburg says points to the strength of the fan base for Balkan brass music.

One surprise for Moran is that the "wave of Balkan music hasn't crested." There was a sense for him that the popularity and interest might fade but he says, "Every time I thought the wave would crest, it just kept on growing."

From Ginsburg's perspective, the reasons for creating Balkan music in America are many and varied. "For some of the bands it's an outlet for writing music, and Balkan music may be the inspiration or providing some of the inspiration."

Moran's response on the question of a divide between tradition and innovation is thoughtful. "It's a divide among people. It's very personal. The traditional people are really concerned with codifying, canonizing and preserving the tradition, and I



Brass Menazeri

Tubthumping

don't mean that deprecatingly." He quotes Gustav Mahler who said, "Tradition is stoking the fire, not praying over the ashes."

Moran believes that the musical cross-pollination between bands is one reason for the lack of a strong divide between the so-called "traditional" and "contemporary".

"There are camps but, fortunately, I think that we're still on a fairly small pond. For the most part, people appreciate what other folks are doing. We certainly listen to bands like the Boban Markovic Orkestar and they're listening to us. They have our CDs and last year when we were playing with them in Berlin, Marko Markovic got onstage and played my original number with us at the end."

Jaques makes some interesting observations on the linkages between tradition and innovation. "We choose our palette from what we hear around us; if it's Balkan music then you draw from that but if you've got a radio and a good worldly DJ, you'll

hear lots of other things to incorporate."

He points out that he feels like he's still part of the tradition. "I feel primarily that I'm a Balkan musician. That's what I've practiced the most, played the most and listened to the most at this point. I come from that as a starting point and then bring things in. The fact that I'm here doing it and grew up here doing it just means I've heard different sets of influences." As Jaques says, "It isn't like Boban Markovic hasn't heard Madonna."

Ginsburg points out that the tradition is being kept alive in its places of origin. The brass band festival at Guca in Serbia is a prime example of this caretaking.

"The people who run this competition have certain rules for what the music may have and may not have. They are, more or less, the caretakers of the tradition in Serbia. People are keeping the traditions alive," Ginsburg says.

Jaques points out that Balkan music has been well documented enough that musicians

can afford to worry more about creating than preserving the traditions. He says that this isn't true of some traditional music that is threatened with extinction. Jaques says that Balkan music is truly "living and breathing".

The birthplace of the music is seeing changes in the sound, too.

"When we go to Serbia, we notice a change in the music there. For example, the music has become much more virtuosic and the bands have become much more skilled over the last 10 or 15 years," Ginsburg says.

Ultimately the future of Balkan brass bands in America looks good. The music seems to have come along at a time when people were in search of something more authentic and fresh.

The popularity of the sound comes from the passion of the musicians, the sense of community among fans of the music, and the rich sounds of the music itself. The tradition is alive and thriving anywhere the music takes root.

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Soul Sister

After a two-year hiatus from the Be Good Tanyas, Frazey Ford returns with her first solo recording, *Obadiah*. Inspired by classic southern soul singers as much as her country-folk roots of the past, it resonates with a sense of joy. Ron Forbes-Roberts is suitably impressed.

The story of the ascension of the Be Good Tanyas to the court of roots music royalty has an almost archetypal rags-to-riches ring to it. In the late '90s, three young women—Samantha Parton, Frazey Ford and Trish Klein—began singing together for fun while tree planting one summer.

Within two years, they had become the Be Good Tanyas and were in the midst of a full-throttle recording and performing career, touring the globe continuously and releasing three critically acclaimed albums in a seven-year period. While these years were rich and satisfying for the trio's members in many ways, they also took their toll, says Frazey Ford.

"We never really expected any recognition or fame," she says. "We were young and got swept up into the industry and it took over our lives, for better or worse. It was really hard on us, hard on our friendships, and hard on our lives."

In 2008, the Be Good Tanyas declared a hiatus in order to reconnect with interests and passions that had been difficult to pursue as full-time travelling and performing musicians. For Frazey Ford this meant spending more time with her then four-year-old son, gardening and beekeeping, and singing for fun with an a cappella gospel group.

But the project in which Ford invested herself during the past two years that fans of the sultry-voiced singer will likely be most excited about is her new solo album, *Obadiah*, which Nettwerk Records will release on July 20.

The country/folk/blues sound for which the Be Good Tanyas are known is undeniably present in several of the album's 12 originals (Ford also covers Dylan's *One More Cup of Coffee* on *Obadiah*). But much of the album's material reflects



Frazey Ford

Ford's affinity for R&B and '60s/'70s-era soul music.

"I've always done R&B and my first band was a soul band," Ford says. "My favourite singers of all time are soul singers: Al Greene, Donny Hathaway, Anne Peebles and Otis Redding. I've been listening to those guys and trying to imitate them most of my life."

Yet Ford didn't slavishly reproduce the Stax-Volt or Muscle Shoals sound on her R&B inflected songs like *Talking a Blue Streak*, *Mama* and *Bird of Paradise*.

The instrumentation on *Obadiah* is sparse, primarily drums, bass and guitar, played by Be Good Tanya member Trish Klein, who Ford refers to as "a lifelong musical collaborator". There are, however, classic trademarks of the genre here and there, including a horn solo on *Bird of Paradise*.

"By the time I finished the album, I was thinking let's keep it completely raw," says Ford. "But then I thought, no I want some of that smoothness, too, because it's so

much a part of the living, breathing modern soul sound."

Another of Ford's most significant influences sings with her on *Lost Together*. "Ever since I was a child, my mom and I had a very special musical connection," Ford explains. "My voice is very similar to hers, which is very country. She loved to sing harmonies and I'd sing the melody. That's how I started singing."

On *Lost Together* mother and daughter reprise those days by harmonizing on lyrics that describe the turmoil of life in the '60s, during which Ford's mother and father left the U.S. to settle in Canada and embraced the alternative lifestyle and non-mainstream outlooks identified with that era.

Ford laughs as she tells the story of how her "hippie parents" allowed her older brother to give Ford her middle name when she was born. He chose Obadiah, the name of the family's runaway cat, unintentionally providing the title for his sister's first solo album.

"It was a crazy time, very dysfunctional but very amazing," Ford says of her

Tubthumping

childhood in the '70s. "They were really incredible people and *Lost Together* is my experience of looking back on what didn't go right and the things that were hard."

Coping with difficult times is a prevalent theme in many of the songs on *Obadiah*. Ford's lyrics never descend into self-pitying, hand-wringing angst, however. Instead, they embrace the notion of accepting the pain that frequently accompanies change and loss in order to move ahead with hope and optimism.

On *Hey Little Mama*, the narrator encourages a very young mother in a difficult relationship to heal the scars of lifelong neglect by focusing on her love for her infant daughter, and the about-to-be jilted woman in *If You Gonna Go* tells her departing lover, "*I'll be alright without you / I can learn to be alone*".

"I wrote these songs during a really difficult time in my life that was about deep, intense, emotional grieving and letting go," Ford says. "It was definitely a period of moving through and beyond. We all face

difficult things but that's what life is and the beauty is to feel it and face it, to move forward and not to remain stuck. There's so much joy in that."

A sense of joy pervades many of the album's songs including the opening track *Firecracker*, in which the singer likens the person she was in her youth to an exploding firecracker and rejoices, *Hallelujah, the sparks flew up to heaven / And I left the sober people with their cold hearts*".

Backed by the core of musicians who contributed to her CD, Ford will take these new songs on the road this summer with a touring itinerary that includes dates with Lilith Fair and shows in England.

She admits that touring under her own name rather than as a member of the Be Good Tanyas will have its challenges.

"In some ways, it will be more stressful because everything—the business end, too—is on me," she says. "There won't be three of us fielding the pressures this time."

Yet Ford is eager to perform again after her two-year hiatus. "I really enjoy that

communion with the audience and I've really missed it," she says. "It'll be a new experience touring with new people but this is a good time of my life to be putting my own work out there because I think it's really come to fruition. I feel very lucky and blessed."



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Chloe & Jason Roweth

Bush Country

Chloe and Jason Roweth rank among the finest interpreters of Australia's traditional bush songs and unique dance tunes—music gaining national attention as mainstream grows ever more insipid. Roddy Campbell caught them in Canberra.

The Coorong early on a warm Saturday morning appears as cosy as a crypt. Yet the punters pack this indoor venue—one of the biggest at Canberra's National Folk Festival—to hear traditional folk songs. And not just by any singers, either. Chloe and Jason Roweth sit in Australia's vanguard.

Their songs tell largely of the hardships, hopes and humour of the station hands, sheep shearers, miners, bush rangers and such like that populated the isolated rural areas of Australia. Strange little dance tunes, too, they eke out of Chloe's mandolin and Jason's guitar. If a somewhat austere sound, it's a hugely pleasing one that embellishes this wonderful repertoire of theirs. And it has struck a chord at a time when interest in traditional music in Australia appears to be on the increase.

Jason: "It does seem to be on an upswing at the moment, especially in terms of the

amount of younger players coming to the folk scene. Not all of them are playing, in the strictest definition, traditional music, but a lot of them are. So I think it's popular at the moment. I think it's growing. A lot of younger players are looking for something different. The more mainstream steers towards bland, middle of the road material, the more people look for something with a bit more depth."

Chloe: "We've seen a big rise in the attendance at festivals over the last few years. The festival thing seems to be thriving. All sorts of different kinds of people come to the festivals looking for different things, being exposed to the music and enjoying the culture that's there. It's definitely positive from our point of view."

What makes their traditional music unique is its origins. While the Anglo-Celts certainly left their mark, so, too, did continental Europeans. In particular, they brought ballroom dance music from the likes of Germany and Sweden, which underwent significant changes in the isolation of the bush. There, indigenous musicians embellished half-forgotten tunes or wrote completely new ones for certain dances.

Jason: "We had a funny time playing Australian dance music in Germany once. We had a traditional musician come up to us and say, 'Yeah, Australian music sounds Bavarian, only strange'."

Chloe: "You've got to take into account, I suppose, the impact of the land and the space. People had a lot of space to dance in. And the climate, of course, would have been hot. So the kinds of dances you would dance would be different than in a small room in Ireland."

"One of my favorite stories here is the way the Australians grabbed hold of the latest things from Europe. In one case it was the schottische, which is a German idea of a Scottish dance. It probably didn't last very long in Europe; it was probably a bit of a fad. But it stuck here, and there are some beautiful schottisches in the Australian tradition."

Jason: "Yeah, we love them because of all the Australian traditional styles of dance music, they, to me, seem to be ... well, you can smell the gum leaves, you know? They really do feel Australian to me."

While the Roweths—yes, they are married—collect material from an assortment of sources, the national library in Canberra proves a significant treasure chest with in excess of 30,000 hours of field recordings on tape or CD in its archives. One of Australia's first collectors was the famous bush poet Banjo Patterson, who wrote *Waltzing Matilda*, *The Man from Snowy River* and *Clancy of the Overflow*.

Jason: "Though we have done some collecting ourselves, we see our role as re-interpreting—bringing that stuff out of the library and re-presenting it on a stage now."

Jason grew up around rural New South Wales. His parents were frequently on the move. He attended 17 different schools before settling in the village of Millthorpe. Chloe came from South Africa with her parents at age 11 and lived in Sydney until she met Jason in 1992. With school friends, she formed an indie pop band that needed someone to record them. A common acquaintance recommended Jason. He was so impressed he joined the band. Within months, though, they left and formed the duo Us Not Them, a name they eventually dropped for Chloe and Jason Roweth. Occasionally, though, they still perform what has been delightfully described as "corrugated iron folk" with the six-piece band, Collector.

Jason: "The idea with Collector was to play the same kind of music that we play as a duo, but to expand the arrangements. We do play some dance music but it's really more, how can we take these bush songs

Tubthumping

and put kick drums and bass and bigger arrangements behind them, and not sound like a classic 1950s style bush band."

Hmmm! That term bush does tend to pop a lot, Jason?

"Bush music is really just a definition of music that's come from outside the big cities. Bush is always 100 miles west of where you are. We sit here in Millthorpe and we don't think this is the bush at all, but if you live in Sydney, we most certainly live in the bush. It's a thing that's relative to where you are."

Initially, Chloe and Jason wrote their own material and included the odd traditional song and tune at gigs. Over time the balance swung more towards the traditional. While they cite the likes of The Beatles and Jeff Buckley as early influences, bush singer Sally Sloane, traditional songwriter John Dengate and collector Rob Willis served as later inspiration.

Jason: "In the end, it was that extra depth that the traditional music had. It had a resonance ... something more than just a good tune. Although I should add, they



were good tunes, good yarns, good stories. They made us laugh, made us cry, did all the things you want music to do. It just had that little bit of extra depth to it."

Chloe: "When you start singing songs about your own country, songs that people relate to, songs that resonate, people dance and go, 'This is exciting.'

"Gigs where it's a bit more low key,

people want to talk to you. They come up, and they want to tell you stories, and they want to share their history, and they want to ask you about that song. And we really enjoy that vibrancy in the music. People's ears perk up. You really are giving people their music and their history back to them, which I don't think happens that much in Australia."

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A wide-angle photograph showing a massive crowd of people gathered at an outdoor festival. The crowd is dense, filling the foreground and middle ground. In the background, there are trees and what appears to be a stage or performance area. The overall atmosphere is one of a major, popular event.

Fatala Attraction

Alpha Yaya Diallo first came to Canada in 1991 with Fatala, the traditional band from Guinea that recorded for Peter Gabriel. Diallo never left. And now the three-time Juno winner has released his first album in five years. Roger Levesque reports.

My dream was to play the guitar," says Alpha Yaya Diallo, remembering his days growing up in Guinea, West Africa.

That he is now doing so as a successful bandleader half a world away in Vancouver, Canada, says much for the man's persistence. His entrancing brand of Afro-pop is still closely attached to his homeland but it comes with its own set of wider influences, and Diallo's songs of concern now speak to the world.

Over five notable recordings, the singer's lyrics have brought particular attention to the political and social turmoil that rages in parts of his home continent. Now, on *Immé*—his first album in five years on Jericho Beach, mostly co-produced with Jesse Zubot—he offers more social commentary, starting with the title track, which translates as *Get Up*.

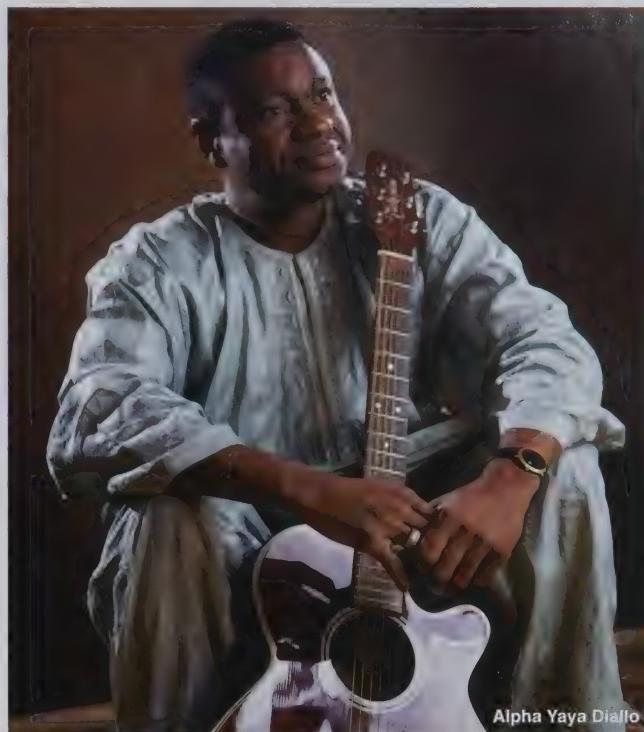
"I'm saying, get up to face the challenges that the whole world faces. Talk about the effects of climate change—it's there already in Africa."

That issue surfaces again on *The Climate is the Heart*, a number he co-wrote with environmental journalist Sanjay Khanna. And on *Walle*, Diallo tells people to help a child today to create a better tomorrow. A few tracks take on more personal themes, like the instrumental *G'nifé Papa* for his son, or *Wondigal*, about the hassles of living together.

Diallo first came to know musician-producer Zubot when their groups were both part of the Sonic Wave tour of Canadian acts sent to Europe in 2003. The bandleader was happy to have him in the studio for *Immé*.

"He gave a lot of ideas. We talked about how some African music is too clean. He said, 'Let's make it thicker and make the guitar more distorted'. I appreciated that."

It's true, those thick polyrhythmic textures and bright uptempo melodies help



Alpha Yaya Diallo

make *Immé* one of Diallo's most powerful releases yet.

His music is getting out, too. A Diallo song appeared on the Hollywood movie *Rendition* and he contributed frequent vocal overlays to the soundtrack for last year's science fiction hit *District 9*. Expect more to come.

Guinea looks like a small finger stuck into the map of musically rich West Africa. Most of its 10 million people originate from the Malenke, Sousou, or Foulani (Diallo's) tribe, though the nation's official language, French, is a leftover of the colonial rule that ended in 1958.

Diallo's father was a doctor who had to relocate his family frequently. That was one factor that helped ensure young Alpha saw many sides of the region's cultural and musical landscape.

After trying to make his own instruments a few times, he finally got a real acoustic guitar at age 11. He taught himself, listening to the Manding music of Faranah, the central-Guinean city where the family lived

at the time. Along with local heroes like Djelimady Tounkara, young Diallo also developed a fascination for foreign guitarists like George Benson, Mark Knopfler, Jimi Hendrix and Paco De Lucia. Cuba's Orquesta Aragon was also a favourite.

"I was playing music for myself and I was into guitar," he explains, "but I always tried to transfer the melody from traditional music to the guitar or maybe to balafon (wooden xylophone). At that time the government was trying to promote culture a lot so there was music everywhere."

Diallo's father steered him towards medicine and he actually finished a degree in bio-genetics at the university in Guinea's capital, Conakry. But throughout his later school and college years he was also playing or jamming with various bands in his off hours, becoming proficient on electric guitar. He loved playing music and wanted to see the world. When one of Guinea's top traditional groups, Fatala, invited him to join he couldn't say no.

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Fatala had originally recorded for Peter Gabriel's Real World label in 1988 and relocated to Europe. The band was expanding when Diallo joined them in the Netherlands and before long they had more than a dozen musicians and dancers. That larger group toured the Canadian festivals in the summer of 1991.

After the relatively crowded lifestyle of Europe and Africa, Diallo was impressed with the wide open spaces of North America. The positive reception Fatala got from big crowds in Toronto, Winnipeg, Edmonton and Vancouver also left him feeling there was real potential for African music in Canada.

"I just loved it and I decided to stay."

Within a year of settling in Vancouver he was married to a Canadian woman and starting to put his first band together, taking his music to schools and regularly playing clubs on that city's Commercial Drive.

"My dream had come true, but now I was seeing all kinds of music. The festivals were great for meeting other musicians, too. It was a wonderful opportunity for me to learn and listen up close to people like David Lindley and Bruce Cockburn. And I was surprised to find how Irish violin melodies were so similar to Foulani. Life is about evolution. I began to try and incorporate new instruments in my own music without overproducing or changing my roots."

Over the many years since, his music has continued to evolve, drawing from a mix of African styles, Manding trance grooves, Mbalax, Soukous, even hints of the Cape Verde Islands with a creeping element of North American funk and pop.

"The point was not to change but to add some flavour. I grew up with a certain music in my blood. Anything I do is going to come from that. I was just trying to make it more interesting, to see these styles work together."

To reach a new audience he also started writing a few songs in English along with his mother tongues Fulah, Malinke and Susu, and his West African French dialect.

His debut recording, *Néné* (1993), was especially impressive given that Diallo played everything—an assortment of African and Latin percussion and guitar—and sang most of the vocals. It was promptly nominated for a Juno Award, something that has happened to every one of his subsequent recordings.

He eventually won the Best Global Album Juno for *The Message* (1998, on Wicklow/BMG), and again for *The Journey* (2001). From the beginning Diallo's band had a racial mix of veterans from various areas of West Africa and from Vancouver. Later, *The Journey* featured another Guinean guitarist, Ousmane Kouyate, who also produced the CD. One track was recorded in 2000 when a Canadian film crew followed Diallo to Guinea for the documentary *The Best of Both Worlds*.

His growing profile as one of the top African bandleaders in North America and his ability to collaborate made him an obvious choice when CBC producer Todd Fraracci brought together six players for the Canadian-based African Guitar Summit. Diallo was proud to contribute his tunes and performance to the group's success on tour and on two Juno Award-winning CDs.

His work with Jesse Zubot on *Immé* is only the latest example of Diallo's interest in cross-cultural collaboration. He promises it's not over yet.

Sweet Surrender

Martin Sexton no longer drinks. Sober and happy, he has just released the quite wonderful *Sugarcoating*—a disc that owes as much to Johnny Cash as it does to ... erm ... Led Zeppelin. David McPherson encounters a whole lotta love.

Martin Sexton is livin' the life. Are you? That's one of the many universal questions the songwriter asks on his new record, *Sugarcoating*. Catching up with the wordsmith finds him on a day off, travelling by bus through Albuquerque, NM, en route to Phoenix, AZ.

Sugarcoating was written last summer in the Adirondack Mountains of northern New York state. As Sexton says, "It's where my heart lives." And so it was that within the wooded wonder of this rustic retreat *Sugarcoating* was born. Some songs were even written in a boat while Sexton was fishing with his friend and fellow songwriter Dan Mackenzie.

"We were trolling in after a day of fishing and writing, and I said we have to write a cheesy pop song since we've been writing these serious tunes ... we need to write something light. I just started singing, '*love is what I feel / when you walk into my living room / I fall head over heels*'. We wrote it in an hour."

The disc was recorded as hastily as this song. *Sugarcoating* was tracked in just seven days with a studio band. "It was very old-school," Sexton says.

"We went in on a Monday and I showed the fellas my songs around the kitchen table at the studio. They charted them out, we went in, and about the fourth or fifth take we had it. Then we would move on to the next song. It was basically a live recording without any tweaks or fancy effects, no auto tuning or Pro Tools editing."

While *Sugarcoating* doesn't feature any fancy effects, what it does offer are 13 songs that run the gamut of genres. As Sexton describes, they range from a Johnny Cash, cowboy-esque number such as *Sugarcoating* to a love ballad gone Zeppelinesque bombast like *Just To Be Alive*. He even throws in a tip of the hat to the Beatles



Martin Sexton

on *Stick Around*—the aforementioned song written while fishing—with its orchestral piano and George Martin production.

Following in the folk tradition of questioning the establishment, the title track revisits that September morn in NYC nine years ago. It asks listeners to rethink what really happened on that "clear blue day." Sexton sings: "*With all the sweet, sweet sugarcoating / nightly news gone entertaining biz / everybody gone all showboating / won't somebody tell it like it is?*"

The song sounds like it could be the theme for *Rawhide*, complete with a multi-track cowboy choir, with all the parts sung by Sexton; the irony of the lawlessness of the Wild West that this cowboy choir creates adds to the song's poignancy.

"In the past couple of years I've awakened to certain realities of the world," he explains. "What really happened on 9/11 and what really didn't happen? I invite everyone to dig a little into that because it's not just history. It's something that we live with today and we will live with for generations to come. Because of that day we are involved in all kinds of wars and attacks on

our civil liberties and constitution."

Sexton believes fear has been forced upon his fellow citizens. He likens this "terrorism" to the new communism.

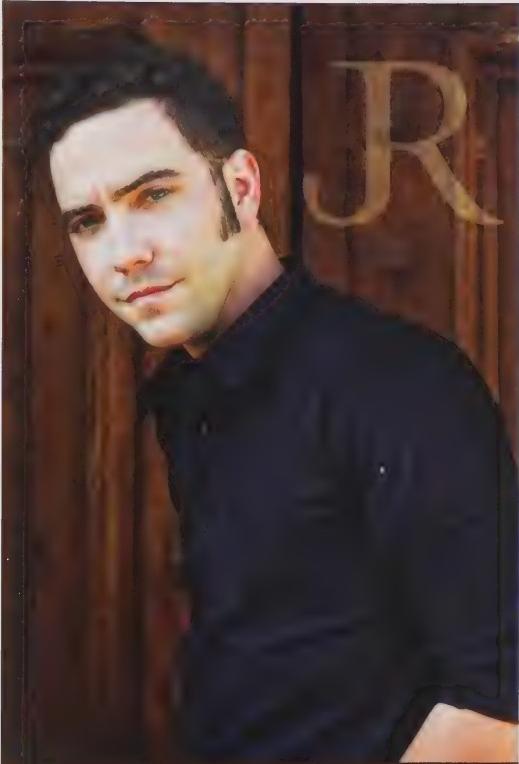
"A scared population will do as it's told," he comments. "A confident, united one will say screw you ... we will do as we please. That's another thing I touch upon on this record: unity. I am trying to see the likenesses in people as opposed to the differences. A unified people are much harder to control..."

One wonders how this unity can be achieved. Sexton says that by seeing the similarities in one another is a good start.

"The differences are so microscopically thin," he explains. "It's just a veneer. The colour of our skin or what we do for a living, or how much money we have, or what neighborhood we come from ... once you scratch that surface, we are so much more alike than we are different. When we realize that, that will be the first step towards being unified."

Throughout *Sugarcoating*, Sexton—who says he was raised one of 12 children by a father who was a devout Nixon sup-

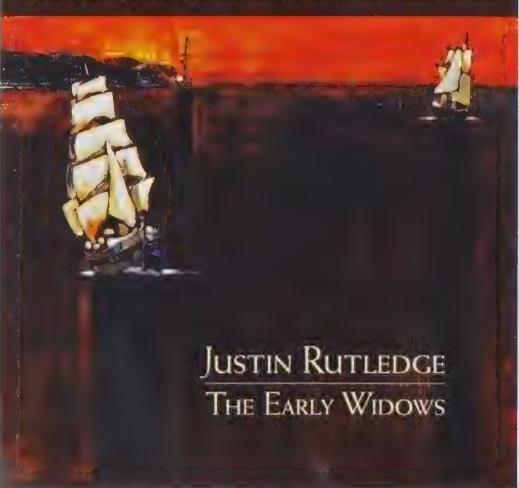
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porter—works out his opinions through his compositions. The songwriter doesn't believe in left or right, Republican or Democrat. "That is a false paradigm that has been projected upon us to keep us fighting against one another," he states.

The 13 songs offer personal as well as political messages. Take *Shane*, an ode to Sexton's toddler. In this ballad, with a hypnotic bongo beat and rhythmic strumming, he tells his son to "follow the bliss" and "make a few mistakes along the way".

"It's a family album of sorts," he says. "There is a song on the record for every one of my kids and for my wife. It's a very personal album as well as being what I hope is a very universal album."

Livin' the Life asks that universal question many ruminate about in staff meetings and while riding the bus to work, but never act upon. Am I doing what I really want to with my days? With a bouncy, bluesy vibe, Sexton asks the listener to consider this: "*Where am I going? / What have I done? / Are you livin' the life?*".

The song, he says, questions the elusive meaning of success. "Is success when you get enough money to have a big house on the mountain and have all the things that cost a lot of money around you, or is it when you find you are doing what you feel you were meant to do?" Sexton comments. "*Livin' the Life* is all about people who quit their corporate gigs to drop out and take a big risk and do what their dream was when they were kids.

"I met a guy in the Grand Teton Mountains of Wyoming in the middle of the woods. This guy comes up and sees me and says, 'Oh my gosh, Martin Sexton, I listened to your *Black Sheep* record all across America and that coupled with some stuff I was going through at that point in my life caused me to quit my Wall Street gig making a couple of million dollars a year. I'm a forest ranger now and I'm happy. I'm making one-onehundredth of what I used to make, but I'm truly happy and doing what I'm supposed to be doing'."

After years of battling alcoholism, Sexton is now sober and truly happy, too. He's certain if he hadn't given up the bottle he wouldn't be here today. He says he is now living the life that he always dreamed of. "The thing about being sober is that it has made me available for life," says Sexton. "It's not about not drinking, it's about living. I'm available for life now."

"I'm blessed and lucky," he concludes. "I hope I'm an example that people can do that, whether it's singing or becoming a marine biologist."



The Complete Covers





Gordon Lightfoot

Magnificent Outpouring

After four decades of performing and recording, Gordon Lightfoot really needs little introduction in these pages. While everyone from Elvis Presley to Bob Dylan has covered his songs, Lightfoot's vast repertoire ultimately remains an integral facet of Canada's cultural DNA. Larry LeBlanc pays a visit.

*If it should please you, I have come to play
A glad or a sad tune, I wrote along the way
And a few good songs about the old highway
I been around so long lord, I guess I'm here to stay*

— Gordon Lightfoot

Contrary to recent media reports, Gordon Lightfoot is quite alive. "I am doing fine," chuckles Canada's foremost folk troubadour. "Everything is moving along fine."

As far back as the mid-'80s, however, Lightfoot was talking about retiring. There was the concert at Toronto's Massey Hall in 1972 at which he came on stage and announced that something weird had been happening to him backstage. He'd lost feeling in one side of his face, like a paralysis. A doctor in the dressing room diagnosed it as Bell's palsy.

The palsy disappeared a year later, but it may have been a sign.

In 2002, as Lightfoot was preparing for an afternoon sound check for a concert at the Opera House in his native Orillia, ON, he had an abdominal hemorrhage in his dressing room. He was taken to McMaster Hospital in Hamilton, where he spent the next six weeks in a coma, followed by three months in the hospital.

Lightfoot admits to being afraid he'd never perform again. "It was touch and go for a year whether I would make it back," he says. "But I was determined."

Two weeks after he awoke from his

coma, in fact, Lightfoot began working on completing *Harmony*, his 20th original solo album, with co-producer Rick Haynes. The album was released by Toronto-based independent Linus Entertainment.

Since then, for varied reasons, the 71-year-old has been working, but at a different pace. He's got family responsibilities that he takes quite seriously. But touring is still part of who he is. You can hear it on his voice as he talks about being on the road.

"God knows, I appreciate the opportunity to get out there and doing these shows," he says. "It's a lot of fun. It really is. I enjoy the travelling, and I enjoy the organizational work that goes into them. And there's a lot of it."

Lightfoot's audience has grown in recent years. "We keep getting new people," he says. "The Internet helps a great deal."

Asked about retirement, Lightfoot shoots back, "No, no. What's Ry Cooder's old saying? 'Bop to you drop.' Yeah, as long as I'm capable; if everybody is capable and enthusiastic, I'll keep heading out."

Lightfoot even bristles at any notion he's slowing down. "I'm not recording, but that's not slowing down. What I did was that I picked up on the touring schedule a little bit more because I really enjoy the work."

There are also, he adds, things more important than recording. "I have family issues to deal with like every other normal person. That requires time. To closet myself to do another album would be a foolish waste of time for me. It'd probably take me three or four years (to write and record a studio album). It would be another period of isolation that I don't wish to endure again."

Without recording obligations, Lightfoot no longer feels the pressure to write. But he admits he still does occasionally write.

"I think about writing; it's always there," he says. "There are always three or four songs on the side of my desk that I take out. But I don't want to commit myself. There are other issues in my life. But I love the (touring) work and I am able to handle that. I am able to handle staying in shape and looking after my family and running the business. That just about takes whatever time is available."

There will be at least one more new Gordon Lightfoot recording. There are plans

for an album of performances recorded at Massey Hall in Toronto since 1998. "Oh yeah, that will eventually come out," he says. "It is something I would save until retirement. I missed a couple of years (of recording) when I was ill. But we recorded shows on four different occasions. I have about 16 or 17 shows in all. It would be a nice recording for people to have."

For years Lightfoot has told interviewers that he cared little for many of his early recordings. However, in poring over the 1992 three-CD United Artists anthology *The Original Lightfoot* recently, he came to apparently re-evaluate that work.

"That's a good piece of work that they did on that," he says. "I was quite surprised that I enjoyed listening to it as much as I did. Of course, I was learning all of the time when I was making those albums."

Lightfoot recently had to re-learn one of his better-known songs, *Home from the Forest*, a 1968 Canadian hit for his friend Ronnie Hawkins.

"I wanted to bring it in for Ronnie when we were in Peterborough (Ontario). So I learned it again. I got back in there to get my bar lines straightened out. I learned that I was really winging it on the phrase lengths in the song. There really was no pattern or system to it. It was really difficult having all of us playing it together and landing in the same place all at the same time."

Lightfoot could coast for years with the

classic repertoire he has at his disposal. "There are 45 or 50 songs I can draw from," he agrees. "I keep adjusting the set all of the time. Sequencing tunes so that they flow well. It's like a hobby. It's like building a model airplane. So you get a show that captivates."

More than 60 of his compositions have been recorded by other artists, including Bob Dylan, Elvis Presley, Marty Robbins, Johnny Cash, Sarah McLachlan and Jane's Addiction.

"I'm happy that anyone does one of my songs," he says. "Some have been really good. I thought Sarah McLachlan's version of *Song For A Winter's Night* was a very different approach. The best version of *Canadian Railroad Trilogy* I've heard was by Ted Wesley. He played it for me in the '70s when I was coming in from a canoe trip one day and landed in Yellowknife. I was really impressed."

Canadian Railroad Trilogy was written in 1966 after Lightfoot was commissioned by CBC-TV to write a song about the building of the Canadian railway for a special broadcast, *100 Years Young*, on Jan. 1, 1967, to start Canada's centennial year.

The latest round of Lightfoot covers include The Jardines' cover of *Sundown* on its self-titled country album, and Canteen Knockout's rendition of *Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald* on the Toronto's band second album, *Broken Down Town*.

Lightfoot has said that in the original



Gordon Lightfoot, Catherine MacLean and Gord Downie



1975 newspaper article he saw after the SS Edmund Fitzgerald sank that the name Edmund was spelled incorrectly as Edmond. He thought at the time that "those men deserved a fitting and accurate tribute." He wrote the song over three days and recorded it in a single take.

To his amazement, *The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald* reached No. 2 on Billboard's Hot 100. "By the time it made WABC in New York, radio programmers were cutting verses and instrumentals out of it," he recalls. "If I'd been smart I would have split it up. I would have put half of the song on one side and half on the other side."

Lightfoot first emerged on Canada's music scene in the late 1950s as rock and folk were taking hold internationally.

In 1958 Lightfoot had spotted an ad in *Downbeat* magazine advertising a theory course in contemporary jazz orchestration and harmony at Westlake College in Los Angeles. He enrolled. Returning to Canada 14 months later, he performed around Toronto while working in an office and driving a truck. He also performed with the Swinging Eight (a square dance ensemble on CBC TV's *Country Hoedown*) and with the Gino Silvi Singers.

With his reading ability and knowledge of harmony, he later earned a living copying scores for local orchestras.

"It was a tough job," he recalls. "Arrangers used to call at all hours and give me a score for an 18-piece orchestra. I had to copy all of the individual parts of the score."

The Two Tones, the duo of Lightfoot and Terry Whalen, appeared in local clubs and released the album *Two Tones Live at the Village Corner* in 1962 on Chateau Records. Despite its local popularity the duo, however, was not considered for the Mariposa Folk Festival being held in his hometown of Orillia, though he's a headliner there this year.

"They said we sounded too much like the Everly Brothers," chuckles Lightfoot. "I was actually flattered by that."

Following a sojourn in Europe in 1963, where he hosted BBC-TV's summer series *Country and Western Show*, Lightfoot returned to Canada to be drawn further into the urban folk music movement being energized by Bob Dylan and others.

"When I first heard Bob, I realized he was moving into musical areas where angels feared to tread," says Lightfoot. "He was getting into areas that no one had explored before. Lyrically and musically, he had an extremely rural approach. I was a small town boy myself, and I could identify with that. So I started to alter my style a bit."

Lightfoot became a significant figure on Toronto's music scene in the early 1960s at a time when Ronnie Hawkins, backed

by Levon and the Hawks, were holding court nightly at Le Coq D'Or club on the city's Yonge Street strip. A few doors up at Steele's Tavern, Lightfoot earned his stripes serenading rowdy engineering students from the Ryerson Institute of Technology nearby.

"I had a great deal of enjoyment down at Steele's Tavern with the Ryerson crowd," Lightfoot recalls. "That was probably the most enjoyable room I ever played in."

Lightfoot's 1967 Canadian hit *Go Go Round* was inspired by watching Hawkins perform at Le Coq D'Or. "Ronnie was the social director for everybody in the club," he recalls. "He had a boxing ring upstairs, and he could really punch that bag. He was working with (heavyweight fighter) Ernie Terrell. I remember sitting in Topp's Restaurant looking at one of this guy's hands as he downed a couple of big hamburgers at two in the morning. 'Holy jeez,' I thought. 'I'd hate to have that guy whack me in the mouth!'"

Ian and Sylvia first heard Lightfoot perform at Steele's Tavern in 1964. They recorded his songs *For Lovin' Me* and *Early Morning Rain* and introduced him to their New York manager, Albert Grossman, who also handled Bob Dylan and Peter, Paul and Mary.

In 1965, Lightfoot was briefly signed to Warner Bros., which released only one single, *I'm Not Saying*, in 1965 (released by Compo in Canada). "The thing didn't sell, man," laughs Lightfoot.

For the next three years, however, he recorded five albums for United Artists and worked extensively on the North American folk circuit. Meanwhile, American artists scrambled to cover his songs, including Peter, Paul and Mary, Harry Belafonte, Judy Collins, Waylon Jennings, Johnny Cash, Marty Robbins, and George Hamilton IV, who released the album *Lightfoot Country*, exclusively of Lightfoot songs.

"Albert wouldn't give away material to anyone until my albums had been released," recalls Lightfoot. "People would request songs before the album came out, and he wouldn't give them out."

Robbins's rendition of *Ribbon of Darkness* spent seven months on the *Billboard* country chart, reaching No. 1.

"That came right out of nowhere," exclaims Lightfoot. "It's the last song I would



Lightfoot: 1961

have ever thought had 'hit' written on it. Certainly not my version. It was too slow. His version was wonderful. He sped it up and made a great record out of it.

"I have a great deal of respect for Marty Robbins. I met him and I was really impressed. He thanked me for writing the song because it had been so successful for him. I used to sing his (1960 hit) *Big Iron* for my uncle Jack. He used to have me play it every time I came to his house."

As the popularity of folk music waned in the mid-'60s, Lightfoot began to shift his musical style away from folk toward pop. "The Beatles killed the folk revival," he says. "Bob Dylan, Paul Simon, myself and some others survived and succeeded, but so many others were stripped and left by the wayside."

When his contract with United Artists expired in 1969, Lightfoot signed with Reprise Records in Los Angeles. "Albert wasn't happy with the job United Artists did," he recalls. "He cancelled the contract. He didn't like the people he dealt with.

"It was a good place to be," Lightfoot recalls about Warner-affiliated Reprise Records. "I was in-house which was good. We had people (musicians) at our beck and call. John Sebastian, and Ry Cooder played on some of my stuff. A lot of that stuff was done without me being present."

In 1971, Lightfoot scored his first U.S. hit when *If You Could Read My Mind* climbed to No. 5 on *Billboard's* Hot 100 chart, propelling his first Reprise album, *Sit Down Young Stranger*, to No. 12 on *Billboard's* album chart. While perform-

ing in Belfast, Ireland, in 1974, the promoter announced at the end of the show that Lightfoot's *Sundown* album had reached No. 1 on *Billboard*, knocking off Paul McCartney and Wings' *Band on the Run*. A week later, the title track single topped *Billboard's* Hot 100 chart.

During the course of 14 albums with Warner-affiliated labels until 1998, Lightfoot would record his most memorable albums, including *Old Dan's Records*, *Summertime Dream*, and *Endless Wire*.

"I got involved with the production on the last four or five albums on Warner," recalls Lightfoot. "It was easier for me to do the bed tracks in Toronto than to fly out to L.A. or Nashville. We had an excellent studio (Eastern Sound) that I did all my work at. Stompin' Tom was in there quite a bit, too. Anne Murray recorded there. We shared the same engineer (Ken Friesen) and shared a drummer (Barry Keane)."

Over four decades, Gordon Lightfoot has sold more than 10 million albums worldwide. He was one of the five first inductees into the Canadian Songwriters Hall of Fame in 2003.

In 1980, Lightfoot was inducted into the Canadian Music Hall of Fame by Bob Dylan who, in the liner notes to the 1985 *Biograph* box set, wrote, "Gordon Lightfoot, every time I hear a song of his, it's like I wish it would last forever."

Meanwhile, Lightfoot's thoughts are on being on the road. "I'm looking forward to Massey Hall," he says. "It's a year off. We will work up until that point. We will probably do 65 or 70 shows before we get back into Massey Hall again. It's really no problem." OSCAR BRAND



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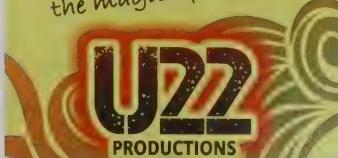
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Oscar Brand

The Penguin Eggs Interview



Oscar Brand

Winnipeg-born Oscar Brand turned 90 in February this year—along with Pete Seeger, he's the last singer standing who's been part of the folk music scene since the '30s.

Along the way he's recorded more than 100 albums, been cited as a communist sympathizer (along with Seeger, Paul Robeson, Josh White and Burl Ives), hosted the pioneering

Canadian television show *Let's Sing Out*, written a couple of hundred songs (including *Something to Sing About*), and has continuously hosted a radio show, *Folksong Festival*, for 65 years on WNYC in New York—a feat that has earned him a mention in *Guinness World Records* as the longest-running entertainment show host in history.

Discursive, cheerful, and blessed

with the experiences of a full life and the friendship of a Who's Who of folk personalities—alive and passed—he speaks openly and clearly, although he often deflects a question not with an answer but with another story.

Richard Flohil spent a Saturday afternoon on the telephone with Brand, who was relaxing in his study at home in Great Neck, NY.

You're writing your autobiography ... how's it going?

I think it's about three-quarters done. I'm on my fourth title now: *One Helluva Ride*. Mind you, I've been doing this for years; the original publisher is dead, and so's the agent. And I don't like working with editors; you end up with a book I don't understand. So it's a whole different book than the one I started 20 or 30 years ago.

What do you remember of your roots in Winnipeg?

Well, we lived at the south end of the city. There were five of us, a close family—my sister is 97 and living in New Jersey—and my father was a linguist. I started to come to the United States because I was born with one leg two inches shorter than the other, and my parents were looking for a cure. We moved back and forth, and I finally settled in (Greenwich) Village.

How did the radio show start?

When I came out of the army—I'd been with the psychology unit, supporting soldiers, men and women, who had returned from war with serious psychological problems—I had no connections, so I sent letters to all the radio stations to see what they had. WNYC was the flagship of the National Public Radio network, located in the municipal building near City Hall, and mostly a classical station. But the director,

Hermann Newman, had had Woody Guthrie on a couple of times, and he thought a folk music show would be good. I'd learned to play the banjo, so I sat in Studio B and sang Christmas songs, and he said, 'So what are you doing next week?' Oh, good, I thought, I've got a job. The pay was \$15 a week; I started *Folksong Festival* in December 1945, and I'm still doing it.

Has the show changed much?

Well, we play different music, of course—not enough from Canada, incidentally; people ought to send me stuff—but it's really the same show, and for the same audience. Working people, poor people, people who try to keep their legislators straight. I had Bob Dylan on about 50 years ago, and last month I interviewed Jakob Dylan. Just about everybody in folk has been on the show.

Had you met the early folk music artists?

Oh, yes. I met Pete (Seeger) when he came down from Harvard. Josh (White) and Leadbelly and Burl Ives were all on the scene. Pete and I are still pretty close friends, all these years on ... and when the show began after the war, they all came on to talk and to sing. Bill Monroe, Carl Sandburg, Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee, Ed McCurdy, and Jean Ritchie, who is still my dearest friend. Woody came on with his son Arlo, and Harry Belafonte, the Kingston Trio, and later singers like John Denver, Gordon Lightfoot, Joni Mitchell, Tom Paxton, Phil Ochs....

Your early records were unusual, yes?

I always liked to have themes to my records. From the late '40s till the mid-'50s, I recorded a series of bawdy ballads records—nearly a dozen of them. They were enormously popular—every college kid had half a dozen of 'em. And a lot of them still sell today; at the time I was the best-selling artist on the labels I recorded for.

A lot of people were shocked by them; there are still a lot of prudes—puritans—in the United States and there all sorts of large groups of people who get angry and want to prevent the use of 'foul' language and stories ... It's funny, but Canadians don't

seem to react that way; if they do they keep it to themselves.

(The original bawdy songs records were done for Audio Fidelity; in the '60s, he made 10 CDs for Elektra—later the home of Judy Collins, The Doors, Carly Simon, and the Butterfield Blues Band, and British rockers Atomic Rooster.)

I always collected songs, back when I was in Canada. And my records always started with an idea, and I would write original songs, and mix them with old traditional songs I had heard, to come up with albums that hung together well.

How's the state of music these days?

Well, you only have six or seven notes available, so there's a limit to what's new. I listen to everything, and I've turned my hand to songs, Broadway, books, plays, film scores—I have always wanted to extend my knowledge. That said, I've never read music, never had music training, and I just always puzzled it out. I've prospered, I suppose, but I never saved any money, never wasted my time counting it....

Great songs exist in dark alleys; there are thousands of old songs that need to be remembered. Doing that is part of what I do.

Did you like *A Mighty Wind*?

Oh yes, I love anything that's funny, and our world can take a joke. I'm not a movie-

goer, but Harry Shearer, who was involved with that film as well as *This Is Spinal Tap*—well, Harry's a genius.

What are the best and worst aspects of America today?

The best is that I'm free. People know who I am and what I do. The worst is that there are large armies of people who would like to see the world smothered in dust, who don't want to learn from the past and that prevents them from truly examining the present and looking to the future; too many people want things to remain the way they were.

And what do you miss about Canada?

Almost everything. And I'm so glad to be coming back for the Winnipeg Folk Festival—my son Jordan, who's a doctor in New York, is going to play bass for me.

Who are your own heroes?

Without question, Eleanor Roosevelt—she was the greatest, greater than her husband, John Huston, the filmmaker. And Jean Ritchie, the greatest traditional singer in America. But I tell you, the world is full of wonderful, admirable people, and if you can't find any, then there's something wrong with you....





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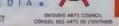
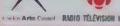
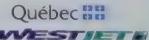
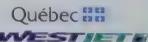
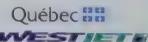
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And yet you are sometimes named as the inspiration for one of the characters on Sesame Street. True?

Well, I was on the original board of the Children's Television Workshop; I don't think they were going the right way—they wanted to talk with children who lived in the country; I wanted the program to talk to children in the city, in the ghetto, with garbage pails and folk sitting on stoops and roughness and grittiness. I wanted them to engage city children, the kids who have to carry knives and guns to school. I think, back then, they wanted to make a business out of what needed to be a cultural institution. I suppose I was a bit grumpy about this, making my views known at meetings....

Later, my friend Glenn Yarborough (of the Limelighters) was on a phone call to Jim Henson, who created the puppets on Sesame Street, and he introduced me, over the phone, to Henson.

He said, "Oscar Brand? OSCAR THE GROUCH?"

Can I ask you for some quick impressions of a handful of other artists? Pete Seeger...

I interviewed him just before his last

birthday. He came from an aristocratic family, he became a hugely influential musician; they put him through hell in the McCarthy era, and he never said a word.... He's always been a good friend.

Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee?

Very special to me. One was blind, one was lame—and I identified with that. They fought a lot, but that'll happen to anybody who tours all the time, for years and years. I was the MC for the very last show they did together....

Bob Dylan?

I loved his songs from the very beginning. He stayed at my apartment when he came to New York; he was a kid who came from a well-off family and really wanted to be somebody else. Like everyone else, I put him on my radio show....

Leadbelly?

I travelled with him in the days when he couldn't get served in a store, or stay at a decent hotel. We went all over the country, and I never cared about whatever he'd done to get

himself in jail, and I never ever felt afraid. A good man, and we became close friends.

Tom Paxton?

When he first came to New York, I put his records on the air, and I still play his music. He's a fine songwriter and a straightforward good man.

The McGarrigle sisters?

I was so sad when we lost one of them. They sang on my program; unique as singers and as songwriters.

Joni Mitchell?

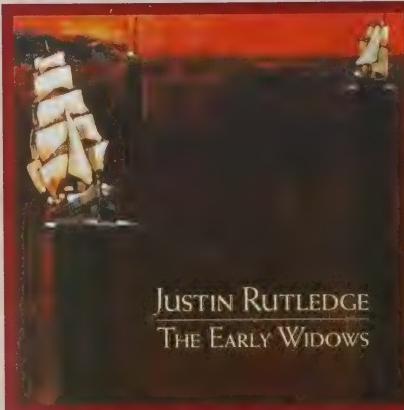
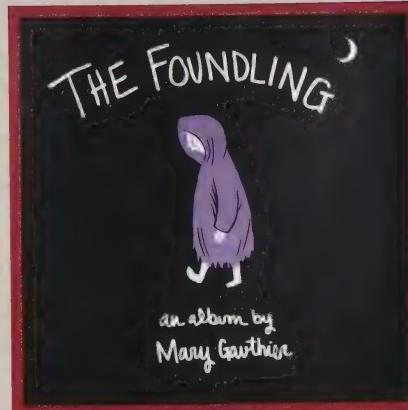
She came on my television show in Canada. She was impossibly beautiful back then, but I think fame changed her. I was on the board at the Newport Festival, and she played there. A lovely person, but the beauty now is inside her....

Christine Lavin?

She played my 60th anniversary show for the radio program, and she's so brilliant she simply took it over—she's a very funny, witty lady and she knows how to do that!



REVIEWS



"Willie assembles a set of stripped-down, pure, country gold mined from the songbooks of Merle Travis, Doc Watson, Hank Williams and the always reliable Trad. " — Willie Nelson: Page 77

"No recording for the weak of heart, this. It's a three-hankie affair, for sure, and possibly the album of the year."

— Mary Gauthier : Page 73



Josh Ritter

Josh Ritter

So Runs The World Away (Pyreheas Recordings)

A day that finds a new Josh Ritter in the mailbox is a fine day indeed. Mr. Ritter has, over the course of 11 years and seven records, released some pretty fine songs into the musical stratosphere. He has shared stages with Ron Sexsmith and in some respects he occupies a similar space in our musical culture: the craftsman who transcends musical genre in his quest for a good song.

So Runs The World Away is a classic Ritter outing in that respect; some songs tend more towards folk, some towards pop, and yet others have more of a rock or blues flavour. But regardless, they're all beauties: *The Curse* is a heartbreaking piano waltz, *Folk Bloodbath* takes Mississippi John Hurt's *Louis Collins* and interweaves it with the stories of Stagger Lee and Little Delia to glorious effect. *Lark* bears the indelible imprint of *Graceland*-era Paul Simon (no small feat!).

It's all wonderful stuff and you can expect to see any number of these songs picked up by other artists over the next few years. Just remember that Josh Ritter wrote 'em first.

— By Richard Thornley

Fred Eaglesmith

Cha Cha Cha (4 out of five)

One of the more magnetic concept efforts from the head Fred, *Cha Cha Cha* is an album entirely—without exception—about girls. Well, OK, there's one tune about drinking whiskey, but a woman is slipped through the kitchen door by the end of it.

"Your hair is always messy and your dress is just a little undone," Eaglesmith paints gingerly on *Tricks* as an example. "I think you're trying to drive me crazy and you're not the only one."

His aura this time is a fusion between Tom Waits and Blue Rodeo—scratches Tucson country—while Eaglesmith's multiple forays into ladyland tend to come off a bit xenophobic. Or, let's say, at least wary and unfortunately familiar. There aren't a lot of wedding dances here, once you get down to the lyrics.

Over a granny parlour organ which pervades the 10 songs, mind you, *Sliver of the Moon* approaches sweetness. "I've done it once again," he croaks. "I've fallen in love."

Every one of these relationships has a caveat. *Car*, the album's king, is a shuffler es-

entially about mental illness.

As usual, Fred's hurtin' choruses glow with an almost secret pop sensibility. Thanks to his well-used female backups, there's actually a bit of mid-career Leonard Cohen happening here—quite a step up from braying about being white trash, the calling card of his populist alter ego, the howling were-redneck. These catchy sambas and waltzes show off Fred's dignified side and testify, most important, to an artist still growing.

— By Fish Griwkowsky

Bettye LaVette

Interpretations: The British Rock Songbook (ANTI)

We all know what it means when a singer makes a song her own. In Bettye LaVette's case on *Interpretations: The British Rock Songbook*, she makes the songs something completely different (apologies to the Pythons).

This 13-track disc covers—that should be rediscovered—some of the seminal tunes from British rock icons of the late 1960s and early 1970s in such a way as to render them almost unrecognizable, and I mean that in the most flattering terms possible.

It is inconceivable that the authors of these songs—which include The Beatles, The Who, the Rolling Stones, Pink Floyd, Elton John, et al.—could ever have imagined the stunning results of LaVette's gifted interpretations.

By way of endorsement, the sticker on the wrapper lists testimonials from the likes of Pete Townsend, Keith Richards and Elton John.

Included is LaVette's powerful performance of The Who's *Love Reign O'er Me*, recorded at the 2008 Kennedy Center Honors gala.

This is a stunning tour de force that will convert first-time listeners into lifelong Bettye LaVette devotees.

— By Doug Swanson

Oliver Schroer and the Stewed Tomatoes

Freedom Row (Borealis Records)

This posthumous release by the late, great fiddler and violinist Mr. Oliver Schroer was completed in his hospital bed—10 years after the bed tracks were recorded. It is eccentric, unpredictable, very musical and completely joyful. A lot like the man himself, really.

The Tomatoes include Colleen Allen on sax, David Travers Smith on trumpet, Rich Greenspoon on drums, Ben Grossman on sax and percussion, Rich Pell on electric guitar, David Woodhead on bass, and many more. Each and every one of them adds something tasty to this musical stew.

They do what Ollie himself described as "wild world music explorations". On one level the music is appealingly simple because it's so easy to get into. On another it is richly complex with all sorts of sonic touches, rhythm changes, grooves and

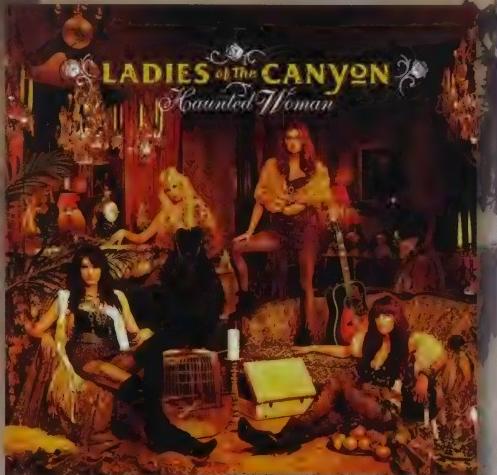


Bettye LaVette

Reviews

HAUNTED WOMAN

The brilliant new album
from Ladies of the Canyon



Ladies of the Canyon are four friends who got together in their living rooms to write and sing songs influenced by their favourite bands – The Eagles, the Band and Fleetwood Mac.

Musicians and songwriters Maia Davies (vocals, guitars, mandolin, keyboards), Senja Sargeant (vocals, guitars, mandolin), Jasmine Bleile (vocals, guitars) and Anna Ruddick (electric and upright bass, vocals) have their distinct tone and personality, but when they come together for harmonies, it's a gorgeous, soaring blend.

Pick up *Haunted Woman* – the new album from
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wacky melodies. However you look at it, and however you hear it, this is loads of fun!

– By Tim Readman

Kirsten Jones

The Mad Mile (*Independent*)

It's been almost seven years since this country-hued songbird released her surprisingly accomplished debut, *Drive-in Movie*. For those wondering what she's been doing since, she might admit to being somewhat of a perfectionist, carefully crafting and road-testing new songs until they're, well, perfect. That, and crafting a baby boy, Joah.

Turns out it's been worth the wait. Surrounded by a wealth of talented help, she offers up 12 gentle, country-dusted originals either self-penned or co-written with her guitarist, Kevin Zarnet, or producer extraordinaire Gary Louris. Louris plays, as does renowned pedal steel god Greg Leisz, Wilco's Bob Egan, O Susanna and Jim Cuddy. Yet name dropping is not meant to detract from Jones's considerable talents. These are her songs, brought to a brilliant finish by the players of her dreams, rendered as only a perfectionist can.

Her gentle ache of a near-angelic voice has become stronger, less wistful over the years and it sits on top of each track, enriched by a tapestry of tastefully appointed accompaniment. A hint of pedal steel, a dash of banjo, a pinch of percussion, the vocals mixed in like so much creamy honey. Her subtleties come into sharper focus with the stunning, reconfigured *Bittersweet Grand Canyon*, delicately blended to Suzie Ungerleider's contribution.

At the same time, she almost disappears against Cuddy's strong, more commercial vocal on *Hold Me Close*.

Yet she clearly owns this material — one listen to *You Ain't Comin'* by sets the hook as it marks her territory. The album's distinctive, undeniable Jayhawks-esque backdrop becomes the perfect complement and a very natural next step in a promising career.

– By Eric Thom

The Stillsons

Circus (*Green Media*)

The Stillsons, a Melbourne-based alternative roots/rock band, released this debut album a year and a half ago back home in Australia.

They are fronted by Justin Bernasconi, an immigrant from England, but also taking a turn at lead vocals is Cat Canteri, their female drummer. In addition pianist and saxophone player Sam Boon and lap steel player Ross Richard round out the lineup.

Collectively they've released a lively and lovely debut. The title song, *Circus*, tells the story of an English girl who has "given up the circus to live by a rule".

Charity and Ghosts (Where's Your Mama Gone?) is a powerful song about generations of British "orphans" that were sent to Australia to populate the nation with white stock. Only, too often, the children sent were not orphans but from poor or disadvantaged families. Amazingly, this continued until 1967.

The Stillsons are not the standard folk rock sound as they draw together varying strands of roots music to

which they add a delicious assortment of instruments including ukulele, oboe, harmonica, accordion, cello, mandolin and glockenspiel.

An excellent debut. I look forward to hearing more.

— by les siemieniuk

Gogol Bordello

Trans-Continental Hustle (American Recordings)

Slightly different instrumentally from past albums, *Trans-Continental Hustle*, has lost none of the band's passion and lust for social commentary. With their celebrated front man Eugene Hutz and his magnificent moustache, these gypsy punks, famous for their unrelenting and effervescent live shows, unite artist and audience with one hell of a party. It is difficult to keep that manic level of energy up in a live show and even harder to capture it on record. Yet, for the most part they succeed, with each song building tirelessly upon the next. Instinctively, Gogol Bordello capture snapshots of different cultures. And *Trans-Continental Hustle* takes their uniquely fast-paced Ukrainian Gypsy music and melds it with the world sounds and



Gogol Bordello

instruments of Brazil to create a new distinctive amalgam that remains very much their own. A brilliant carnival soundtrack, then, this *Trans-Continental Hustle*.

— By Phil Harries

Mary Chapin Carpenter

The Age of Miracles (Rounder Records)

It's been a while (20 years or so, I think) since Mary Chapin Carpenter, surprisingly and unexpectedly, took Nashville and the country music world by storm and ended up top of the hit-making heap for a couple years. Her musical presence of late has been rather low-key.

So in the midst of our preoccupation with the plethora of new singer-songwriters that seem to pop up weekly like mushrooms, it's a good idea to remember that there are masters still producing vital and exciting work.

I first fell in love with her graceful ability to string words together in the simplest of ways, yet those words carry a complexity of details and meanings. Her ballads here continue to shine in their ability to make

a melancholy sense of a bitter-sweet world where things may not work out exactly like you wanted or planned. But there is always hope, and the realization that you are always stronger than you think.

Mary, blessed with an achingly beautiful voice and supported by her amazing sense of melody, rolls out the 12 songs on *The Age of Miracles* one after another in an easy, gentle, undulating and graceful procession. The opening track, *We Travelled So Far*, is exquisite.

The title song expresses a very real sense of the perseverance and strength of the human spirit. Because she is the great songwriter she is, she makes us feel that the stories of Tiananmen Square, Hemingway's first wife, and her own foibles are also our own personal stories. *The Age of Miracles* gave me goose bumps 'cause she knows my life so well.

This is release number 13, I think, and the worst thing I can say about this collection is, if you don't get the goose bumps I did, it's just a well-crafted album that perhaps stumbles

once into a cliché of new-age spirituality—but that's one merely good song amongst 11 great ones.

And come on, really who else could carry off calling themselves a zephyr nearly this well. Besides, it's immediately forgotten when the wonderful *I Put My Ring Back On* takes over.

Mary Chapin still delivers the musical goods better than most.

— by les siemieniuk

John Hiatt

The Open Road (NewWest Records)

Is there anything new you can say about John Hiatt. This is his 19th record. The songs are simple, catchy and witty. He's still a rogue and Gypsy traveller flying down the mythological road, but maybe with the realization it's not the romantic answer it used to be to all life's problems. His voice sounds a little older and more world weary. *The Open Road* of these songs is a place "where the hopeless come" and where "they bring their broke-down loads". The old open highways rascals always escaped to are now in need of repair and lit-



Mary Chapin Carpenter

Reviews

tered with old rusting wrecks of people's dreams.

The road may still be a pull on the man yet at the end of the record he's begging, "Baby, can you carry me back home?".

So, John Hiatt, still cranking out relevant, interesting material and ... he still plays a perfectly good guitar.

- by les siemieniuk

Karan Casey and John Doyle

Exiles Return (Compass)

Karan Casey and John Doyle were compatriots back in the glory days of Solas, both departing for solo careers around the turn of the century. I can't honestly say how much their paths have crossed in the intervening years, but hearing them together again in this relatively modest setting of traditional

songs is an unalloyed pleasure.

Doyle, of course, provides much of the musical backdrop with his distinctively nimble guitar, with added textures from Dirk Powell (banjo, double bass) and Michael McGoldrick (flute, whistle). Both Doyle and Casey are incredible singers also, and feature here in a number of solo and duet settings.

The end result is a very striking record, one that may not garner attention outside the world of Irish traditional music, but one deserving of much broader exposure.

- By Richard Thornley

The Cottars

Feast (Rounder)

Founding members Ciaran MacGillivray and Fiona MacGillivray of this Cape Breton quartet are joined here by Bruce Tim-

mins and New York state fiddler Claire Pettit. They all sing and all play a number of instruments on this, their fourth release.

Things kick off with a bluegrass-inflected take on *Fare Thee Well Northumberland* from the pen of Geordie boy Mark Knopfler. From there they delve into some传统als, a Lightfoot tune, some originals and a Peter Knight song. The instrumentals are faultless and demonstrate beyond doubt that they can certainly all play. As for the songs, everything is sung prettily and sweetly but it is a little too sugary for my taste. When roots music is too polished it tends to mask the grittiness that makes it so compelling. *Feast* will appeal to those with a much sweeter tooth than mine.

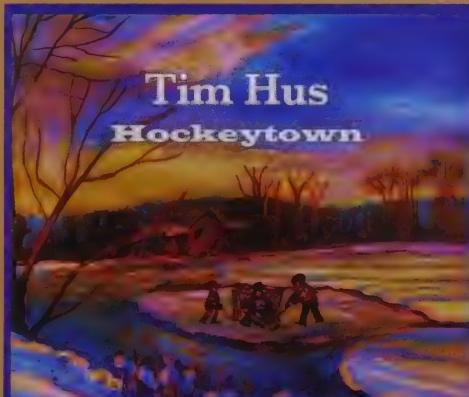
- By Tim Readman

Karla Anderson

Brand New Day (Indelible Music)

After earning raves for her debut disc, *The Embassy Sessions*, in 2005 Karla Anderson has taken her time with her followup and the results are certainly worth the wait. Recorded at Edmonton's Beta Sound Recorders with session veterans Tim Leacock (guitars), Mike Lent (bass), Lyle Molzan (drums), Gary Koliger (guitars and banjo), Ted Borowiecki (keyboards) and C.J. Vanston on a single track, the disc has the relaxed feel of a seasoned performer playing music with her favourite band.

Eleven of the 13 tracks are originals, the two covers being *I Dream an Old Lover* by Jeffrey Foucault, and the Felice and Boudleaux Bryant classic, *Bye Bye Love*, first made



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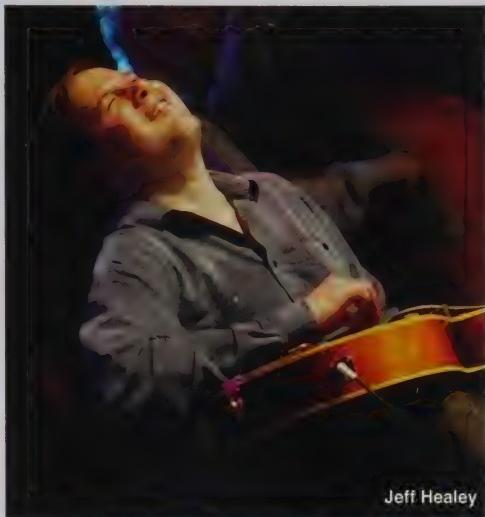
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Reviews



Jeff Healey

famous by the Everly Brothers. This version is slower paced and, as with all the tracks on this disc, the outstanding part is Anderson's voice, which is as soulful as any New Orleans blues artist and as vulnerable as any country balladeer.

One of the most representative is her lilting *Don't Waste Your Breath*. This disc should take the singer as deep into the music business as she cares to venture.

– By Barry Hammond

Nuala Kennedy

Tune In (Compass Records)

This is the Irish flautist and singer's second release under her own name, but she is hardly playing solo. There are 18 other musicians here; including Bonnie Prince Billy, Oliver Schroer, Alasdair White and Luke Daniels; playing in combinations from a duo, all the way up to a nine-piece band.

She wrote the whole thing except for four traditional tunes/songs from Ireland and Scotland. She already has a reputation for eclecticism that

is further enhanced here by the variety of songs and tunes on offer. *All of These Days* swings jazzily, *My True Love* starts on a funky groove, while *The Books in My Library* is more of a pop ballad. Mostly though, the music harkens back to her place of birth and to her adopted home in Scotland. It is all beautifully played and sung from start to finish. So tune in, you won't regret being on her wavelength.

– By Tim Readman

Jeff Healey

Last Call (Story Plain)

The heartbreak of losing Jeff from our collective music community is doubly painful: not only is he gone forever but he was never properly recognized for playing the music he loved more than anything. Jazz.

Which makes the morbidly titled *Last Call* all the more endearing. Jeff is on fire here—playing the music he so audibly loves, joined by two good friends clearly sharing the faith: Jazz Wizards Ross Wooldridge (piano, clarinet)

and Drew Jureka (violin).

From sessions recorded back in '07, Healey launches into favourites like Hoagy Carmichael's *Hong Kong Blues*, Eddy Lang/Joe Venuti's *The Wildcat and Black And Blue Bottom*, playing like a man possessed, on guitar, trumpet and in particularly fine voice. The closing track, an updated pop tune written by Canadian Shelton Brooks, made famous by Sophie Tucker, is pure Jeff: he provides all instrumentation plus vocals.

A highlight, aside from the two barn-burning Lang/Venuti instrumentals, is *Guitar Duet Stomp*, another Lang number originally recorded with Lonnie Johnson, with Healey playing both parts, fervently. The inclusion of a bonus "live" video, lovingly shot by friend and historian Mako Funasaka, adds a moment of intimacy forcing reflection on the subject of this talented man gone way too soon.

– By Eric Thom

Martin Simpson

True Stories (Compass Records)

After 40-plus years in the English and international folk scene, it's great to see Martin Simpson still pushing on to new territory. No wonder he's on Compass Records! He needs one to keep his bearings as he flits prodigiously from New Orleans to Northumberland, Scotland to the American West, from the blues to nursery rhymes.

Some of this he wrote, some is trad arranged Simpson but all is effortlessly executed by him and his fine sidemen, which include Danny Thompson, B.J. Cole, Jon Boden, Andy Cutting and Phil Selway, Radiohead's drummer.

He's never been the strongest singer but his half spoken

delivery works well with the material here and he knows how to get a tale across, which, of course, is the whole point. But are they true stories? Well why don't you have a listen and decide for yourself?

– By Tim Readman

Jeff Beck

Emotion and Commotion (Atco/Rhino)

Album producer Steve Lipson sums up Jeff Beck's prodigious skills nicely in his liner notes: "He casually plays something that no one else could get close to". Jeff Beck's only competition ever is whatever he last recorded and, should he next decide to record 60 minutes of him tuning his guitar, you know it would be profound and worthwhile.

Ever-evolving, the success of last year's Ronnie Scott release—in all its instrumental splendour—has steered him towards sweeping, epic statements set against a backdrop of a 64-piece orchestra and a bevy of guest vocalists. If that sounds somewhat pretentious, if not slightly bombastic, it's redeemed by the choice of Joss Stone on Screamin' Jay Hawkins's *I Put A Spell On You*.



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and *There's No Other Me*.

Beck cannot disappoint. Harder-edged moments like *Hammerhead* and his solo break in *Never Alone* advance the category, if there was one. The gentle, lush lines of *Corpus Christi Carol* work as delicate brush strokes against a soft canvas of strings, the orchestration serving to add loft to each solo, helping them soar.

At the same time, it takes some getting used to. The most surprising combination comes in the form of Jeff's duet with opera superstar Olivia Safe on *Serene*, which, as it turns out, proves otherworldly.

This is a surprisingly stately Beck, resplendent in rich, drawn out phrases yet with enough grit and grind to offset the somewhat anti-septic Lipsom/Trevor Horn production sheen, keeping it fan-friendly. Aptly titled.

— By Eric Thom

Rita Chiarelli

Sweet Paradise (Independent)

This is the eighth release from the publicly acclaimed "Canadian Goddess of the Blues". Chiarelli possesses an impressive three-octave vocal range that blends equal parts gravel to soul yet, it must be said, she's been riding those coattails for some time.

Sweet Paradise is a case in point—it takes this disc four tracks to ignite and only then does the music start to incorporate anything remotely connected to soulfulness or commitment. Wisely surrounding herself with great musicians, notably the guitars of Papa John King and Christine Bugie plus Dennis Keldie's warm, enveloping B3, things slowly

unfold. *Light the Fire* is a disc highlight as Chiarelli invests her powerful pipes into the material.

Likewise, *Stone by Stone* follows a more gospel-oriented bent and Chiarelli shines in this light. Rootsy detours like *Rest My Bones* show some promise as her vocals probe for more context, and *1,000 Miles* incorporates some tasty slide and piano, slowing things down, allowing her the chance to add more meat to her vocals.

Yet songs like *French Kiss*, which alone could set bilingualism back by 100 years, or the horrid *Going Down To New Orleans* underline the fact that Chiarelli could use some fresh direction, if not clear focus. A quick listen to the reprised version of *If It Was Love* proves that she still has outstanding vocal chops and loads of potential. However, much of this material transforms her into Rita MacNeil/MOR territory—and her fans deserve better, especially when they know she's got it in her.

— By Eric Thom

Storyhill

Shade of the Trees (Red House)

I must admit that I thought I was going to find Storyhill's latest outing annoying when the first track came on, but I persevered and I find myself getting attached to this duo.

Playing stripped down music, with just a couple of acoustic guitars and the odd harmonica solo and the production of Grammy winner Dan Wilson, Chris Cunningham and John Hermanson have to rely on the honesty of their voices and the songs. With tremolo-laden har-

Reviews



Mary Gauthier

mon vocals that occasionally hearken back to early Simon and Garfunkle, but sometimes soar a la Tim Buckley, and heartfelt songs with titles like *Well of Sorrow* and *Cover Your Tracks*, they manage to capture a melancholy mood.

Hermanson and Cunningham have sung together since high school days in Montana, and it shows in the tightness of their harmonies. Although they have put out more than 10 albums, they haven't made much of a ripple north of the border yet. This outing might create a name in Canada for these two folkies.

— By Mike Sadava

Xarnege

ixo*sho (Collectif Pyrénées)

There are more nations and cultures in Europe than we ever knew. Xarnege (looks like carnage, only with an X! Even cooler!) is actually pronounced shar-NEG-eh and the album title, *ixo*sho*, translates as "Be quiet and listen!" The music

draws upon the ancient roots of Gascony in southwest France and the Basque country in northeast Spain.

These two regions, divided, or rather united, by the Pyrenees, share a common culture and Xarnege aims to draw it forth into the modern world. The band's members come from both sides of the mountain range and bring long experience with the specialized traditions of their two areas.

Never was the term multi-instrumentalist so apt. Masters of the boha, flabuta, xirula and ttun-ttun, the very names ring with esoteric exoticism. These are blended with bagpipes, fiddle and bouzouki to create music sounding like first cousins to Celtic and Scandinavian folk tunes.

There's plenty of attitude with edgy string solos and an almost heavy metal hurdy-gurdy. Though I didn't recognize a word of the lyrics, I could swear I've met the monsters, murderers and lovers these bal-

lads evoke.

Production values are great and arty black-and-white close-ups of the hurdy-gurdy tell us this is no backwoods band. I'd love to know how many people can read the album notes, which, with the exception of one paragraph, are written exclusively in Basque and Gascon.

— By Lark Clark

Mary Gauthier

The Foundling (Razor & Tie)

The Foundling surely ranks as intensely personal and gut-wrenchingly moving a record as any you are likely to hear this or any other year. Indeed, its raw, dark, naked emotion makes *Songs of Leonard Cohen* sound like a *Seasame Street* singalong. It's a chilling, heart-breaking concept album that documents Gauthier's abandonment at birth, her subsequent life in orphanages and foster homes and ultimately her search for her birthmother, who when found, refused to meet. Lyrically incisive, unsentimental and brutally honest, it's a turbulent voyage of soul-bearing personal discovery that triumphantly concludes somewhere around *The Orphan King*: "Momma kissed me one time and then said goodbye, but I still believe in love."

Flawlessly produced by Michael Timmins of the Cowboy Junkies, *The Foundling* seamlessly stretches across folk, roots and country with an arsenal that ranges from traditional Appalachian a cappella (*Coda*), Parisian café accordion (*The Foundling*), to New Orleans brass band (*Sideshow*) . . . Gauthier's gritty vocal delivery simply adds to the immense pathos. No recording for the weak of heart, this. It's a three-hankie affair, for sure, and possibly the album of the year.

— By Roddy Campbell

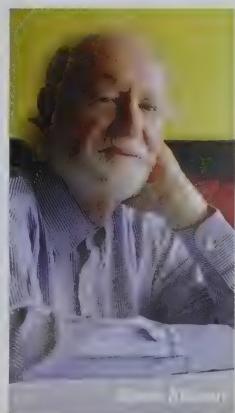
Mose Allison

The Way of the World (Anti-)

At 82 years of age, Mose Allison remains one cool cucumber, an ageless hipster who, despite not having recorded for some 12 years, has more than proven he still has it. Skilled producer Joe Henry captures Mose in his element—linking past to present, blues to jazz, the hip to the heartfelt—a dozen near-originals tossed out like a walk in the park, delivered with that ever-present twinkle in his mind's eye.

Tastefully, yet minimally, enhanced by Greg Leisz, David Pillich, Anthony Wilson and some vocals from daughter Amy, Mose tinkles his ivories as he forces your brain to smile at the state of *My Brain* (with apologies to Willie Dixon) or titillates with the tongue-in-cheek delivery of *Modest Proposal*.

Laugh aloud at *I Know You Didn't Mean It* because you know she did. Consider *Crush*, a solid instrumental with real teeth despite being played by 82-year-old fingers, or the touching, spin-on-a-dime duet between father and daughter on *The New Situation*. The vocals might hold a little rasp



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and the notes may be a little softer sounding but there's real wit in his wisdom and plenty of strut left in his music.

This is a wonderful release from a serious musician who's probably never taken himself as seriously as his fans do. Therein lies his success to this day.

— By Eric Thom

Little Miss Higgins

Across the Plains (*Independent*)

I've never warmed up to Little Miss Higgins's brand of old school, jazz-tinged blues. In a generic sense, it's loyal to that vaudeville era but, for the life of me, she conjures images of Betty Boop singing tunes appropriate to a Woody Allen stag or suitable requests to help the Titanic go down. I just didn't get it enough to warm up to it.

However, *Across the Plains* is more adventurous and musically rewarding. She's surrounded herself with sympathetic musicians who spur her forward and the use of horns, alone, lift each arrangement to higher ground. Humour plays a large role in her material and the hilarious *Bargain Shop Panties* is only eclipsed by *Glad Your Whiskey Fits Inside My Purse*.

Yet—surprise of surprises—Higgins revisits a song first heard on *Cobbler Shop Sessions* called *Slaughterhouse*. Voila! Contributions by Big Dave McLean (harp) and Tim Williams (mandolin) help deliver a dark

blues track that makes me wish they had set the tone for her entire career. Everything is focused on that track—from her twisted, effects-laden vocals to the stinging guitar, tortured harp and dark mood—and the next seven-plus minutes entirely reconfigures everything I had assumed about Little Miss Higgins as it opened my eyes to the repertoire that's distinguished her thus far. Full of surprises? Bring it on.

— By Eric Thom

Chris Coole and Ivan Rosenberg

Farewell Trion (*Vole-O-Tone Records*)

Chris Coole and Ivan Rosenberg snuck in a couple of recording sessions in Portland last year, and it's a good thing they did.

Longtime admirers of each other's work, they have a memorable, musical conversation with clawhammer banjo, resonophonic guitar and guitar, along with Coole's unmistakable character voice on half the tracks, that shows just how damned good old-time

music can get.

Both are brilliant on their instruments. This is essentially simple music, but with sophisticated arrangements that keep the disc interesting. Although mandolin master John Reischman adds his two cents' worth on a couple of tracks, including a wonderful rendering of *Going Across the Sea*, Coole and Rosenberg make up a complete package. Although they're both busy with numerous other projects, just hope they do some more touring together.

— By Mike Sadava

The John Hartford Stringband

Memories of John (*Red Clay Records*)

String music wouldn't be what it is today without John Hartford. He took what Flat and Scruggs, Bill Monroe and other founders did and brought it to a new level with a modern touch, and introduced a lot of hippies to the wonders of bluegrass.

He had the charisma, chops and grooves—along with those feet that





Goran Bregović

never stopped moving and that bowler hat—that inspired kids from Canada to make pilgrimages to Tennessee to visit the great one.

Hartford died more than 10 years ago but his legacy lives on, and his old band—Bob Carlin, Matt Combs, Mike Compston, Chris Sharp and Mark Schatz—have honoured him with this disc of the songs he recorded, performed and some that were never put on disc.

No *Gentle On My Mind*, but there's *Home of the Roamer*, a slippery fiddle tune Hartford wrote but never recorded, and *Lorena*, a Hartford favourite written before the American Civil War.

With guest performers such as Bela Fleck and Tim O'Brien, and even a previously unreleased *Fade Out* by Hartford himself to appropriately end the album, this serves as a worthy introduction to his music.

Schatz aptly describes Hartford's legacy in his poem *For John*, accompanied by his feet: "It's through your window I can see, and I'll crack my heel for the family."

—By Mike Sadava

Goran Bregović

Alkohol: Šlivovica & Champagne (Wrassé)

Known primarily as a composer of film scores, Goran Bregović rocks out here on a collection of original and traditional Balkan pieces.

Throwing subtlety out the window, the pace is boozy (as befits the album's title) and unrelenting, with great lashings of Balkan brass and distinctive vocals from Bulgarians Daniela Ratkova and Ludmila Ratkova. Taken in small doses it's actually a lot of fun and works really well as a shuffle mix component on your iPod. In its entirety it gets a little weary on the ear. But for your next drunken party soundtrack you could do far worse.

—By Richard Thornley

James Gordon

My Stars Your Eyes (Borealis Records)

If you go to James Gordon's website you see this gem of a quote: "Counting the albums I made with Tamarack, I've hit FORTY of the little darlings now, spread out over 30 years."

What else really needs to be said—songwriters don't making a living in music over 30 years

if they're not good at it. James is the quintessential Canadian singer-songwriter. He sings of life, of Canada and the land, and he's done most of the heavy lifting along the way himself, playing a myriad of instruments including banjo, recorder, harmonica, trumpet, accordion and guitar.

One good thing about longevity: after 30 years he has also produced two sons, Evan and Geordie, who now help quite ably in the rhythm section.

As with every other album,



James Gordon

there's a few gems on this one, along with just plain good ones. I love the song *Kelvinator*, which tells a tale of the modern world being the way it is through his grandpa's purchase of a refrigerator from Eaton's. And every musician should take note of the *The Great Duncan Heist* to protect themselves.

James Gordon should be a household name in this country. If you've never sampled his wares, *My Stars Your Eyes* is as good a place to start as any.

—by les siemieniuk

Roky Erickson with Okkervil River

True Love Cast Out All Evil (ANT)

Roky Erickson's life story is a tearjerker. He was co-founder and front man of the 13th Story Elevators, a seminal '60s band in the history of psychedelic rock. But then one day—one joint—in Texas dealing with Texas cops led to a hospital for the criminally insane for years and, amazingly, a bit of a musical comeback in the mid '90s.

Will Sheff from Okkervil River was presented with some songs Roky wrote—most in the hospital in the '70s—and decided to back him up for a recording.

The result is compelling, interesting and moving ... and very well done.

Erickson's raspy voice is front and centre singing hymns that seem to come out of a solitary confinement cell. The band lays back and does a great job underscoring the words. The songs have a powerful feeling of yearning and are dripping with emotion. If Roky started psychedelic rock this could be the start of psychedelic folk.

It's a terrific experiment for the boys in Okkervil River and a nice touch to Roky's career. And if you want more detail on Roky's life and the project

Reviews

itself, the liner notes by Will Sheff are a great read.

— by les siemieniuk

Joe Belly

Nickles and Dimes (MusicNL)

Joe Belly (born Phil Goodland in St. John's, NL) travelled around for awhile in Toronto and British Columbia and worked as a baker before returning to St. John's to get serious about his music career. Backed by a team of solid musicians (such as Sherry Ryan, who adds some fine vocals and piano, Joel Adams on drums, Daniel (Stan) Erl on pedal steel, Alison Corbett on violin, and David Baird on bass) his is another pretty strong self-produced debut.

The music is robust, the playing sweet and melodic, and Joe Belly has a plaintive,

pleasant and engaging voice. He can also provide a good turn with all the other weapons at his disposal: a lyric, guitar and harmonica. It's straightforward country and western, without much in the way of surprises, but that's a strength rather than a drawback in this case.

With only nine tracks on the disc, it's definitely a case of leaving them wanting more, rather than having had enough.

— By Barry Hammond

Jon and Roy

Homes (Independent)

True story: I saw Victoria's Jon and Roy perform in Edmonton about a year ago. Guitarist/vocalist Jon Middleton was in the grips of some cruel flu virus he'd contracted on the road but went onstage all the same. Mid-set, he stag-

gered to the wings, vomited copiously in an empty beer jug, then got back on stage and kept performing.

I was so impressed by this instance of show-biz trouperdom that I'm loath to say anything against the low-key, world music-inflected folk-pop he makes with drummer/percussionist Roy Vizer and the retinue of guest musicians—on fiddle, pedal steel and accordion—they draw on to fill out their sound.

While not quite earth-shaking, the music on *Homes* has the unfussy warmth of a stony rental house jam among friends who have been getting together for a long time. The arrangements are slight, the lyrics laconic, the vocals pitched just above a mumble, which all just make you lean in a little closer to hear what's going on. Check out the

Thomas Mapfumo-inspired *Any Day Now* or the sprightly *Homemade Shirts* to see if it's your bag of tea.

— By Scott Lingley

The John Henrys

White Linen (9lb Records)

Heavily influenced by Tom Petty, The John Henrys fall in line with the plethora of bands who form based on a shared love of the good old days. Instead of living in line with the current times, they soak themselves in nostalgia and pay homage to the way things were.

The difference between The John Henrys and every other dude rock band is they aren't half bad. Perhaps it's just my soft spot for Tom Petty.

As a whole, *White Linen* is an 11-track collection of clichés and Blue Rodeo rip-offs. The

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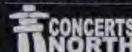
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John Henrys are exactly as they describe themselves—ordinary, everyday and formulaic.

Every song is based on the same building blocks—verse, chorus, verse, chorus, exploring archetypal themes of women, patriotism, the north, heartbreak and December. This is a dad album if there ever was one. Sorry John and Henry, but it's been done time and time again.

—By Shannon Webb-Campbell

Natalie Merchant

Selections from *Leave Your Sleep*

(NoneSuch)

For her new release Merchant, the former 10,000 Maniacs vocalist and Woody Guthrie interpreter, has set to music (initially for the benefit of her young daughter) a selection of children's verse ranging from old English ballads to the likes of Edward Lear, Ogden Nash, e.e. cummings and numerous others—in the liner notes she claims the full tally came to about 60.

The 15 tracks here feel like a substantial helping of Merchant's meticulous, theatrical arrangements, largely delivered in her trademark sombre tone that seems at odds with the whimsical doggerel she's adopted as lyrics. In places this works to good advantage, as on

the klezmer-tinged treatment of Albert Bigelow Paine's *The Dancing Bear* or the swaggering, Basin Street take on Nathalia Crane's *The Janitor's Boy*, while the rocksteady groove of William Brighty Rands's *Topsy-Turvy World* connotes the band in which Merchant first came to prominence.

Undoubtedly there are gems scattered throughout and the arrangements are thoroughly remarkable, but even the most patient six-year-old is likely to have their attention span tested by the longer songs and overall running time. Mom and Dad might like it, though.

—By Scott Lingley

The Malarkeys

Bloody Brilliant (Real Gone Songs)

The Malarkeys are a Celtic-influenced band from Kelowna, BC, and this is their first release. They are fronted by Karl and Gail Hourigan on guitar and bass, respectively. Both sing, as does Eddie Plotnikoff on fiddle. Jay Dallimore plays drums and percussion and they are joined on this recording by Lisa Grekul on keyboards and vocals and Ryan Campbell, also on drums and percussion.

There are 10 original songs here, with the emphasis on

danceable rhythms and catchy choruses. The themes include the power of positive drinking, bike riding, sea faring, time travel and love going well or gone bad.

On *Banker's Holiday* they also show their political hearts are in the right place as they take a poke at dispassionate capitalists and their indifference to the plight of the workers. This is a positive beginning for some seasoned musicians, finally flexing their Celtic musical muscles to good effect.

—By Tim Readman

Willie Nelson

Country Music (Rounder)

While it might seem redundant for someone who has had such a prolific hand in the invention of the contemporary genre to call an album *Country Music*, Willie Nelson's torrential recorded output—which in recent years has included blues, reggae, jazz and children's albums—makes such annotations downright helpful. Abetted by producer T-Bone Burnett, Willie assembles a set of stripped-down, pure, country gold mined from the songbooks of Merle Travis, Doc Watson, Hank Williams and the always

reliable Trad.

The intimate, unaffected sound generated by the drummerless backing band—which includes guitarist Buddy Miller, pedal steel man Russell Pahl, mandolinist Ronnie McCoury and stalwart mouth-harpist Mickey Raphael—will doubtless stand the test of time a lot better than some of the slicker items in Willie's recent output. The man himself, at 77, sounds like he hasn't aged at all in 30 years. He may not be breaking any new ground on *Country Music*, but in this case it's entirely welcome.

—By Scott Lingley

Garma

Cambalúa (several records)

Bounding with rhythmic energy and a passion for their local culture, Garma plays music from Cantabria, a region hugging the northern coast of Spain and bordering the Basque Country. *Cambalúa*, the group's third album, sees the band sharpening its focus on tradition while raising the dance floor temperature.

Very much an ensemble, Garma incorporate whistles, bagpipes, alboka, accordion, guitar, bass, and a battery of drums and percussion instruments with their solo and harmony vocals. Repertoire includes a gavotte from Brittany, a hornpipe (literally! the alboka is comprised of two cow horns) and a village stick dance, which this Spanish group thinks "sounds Scottish". The players are really listening to one another, engaging in delightful musical banter, particularly between the flute and the accordion.

In recent years as more recordings with Spanish, French and Eastern European bagpipes become available, my ear is beginning to recognize deep roots underpinning so much of Euro-



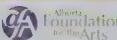
Willie Nelson

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pean folk music. How much more pleasurable, then, to be treated to unique regional flavours, the many icings on the continental cake.

Cantabria has recently established a formal body to monitor its regional dialect, Cántabru, and Garma's songs are sung in that language. With a few original compositions thrown into the mix, Garma is carving its own niche into this region's traditional music.

— By Lark Clark

Leslie and the Badgers

Roomful of Smoke (Independent)

L.A. singer-songwriter Leslie Stevens has one of those twittering voices that seems, at first blush, built for wistful lyrical musings, if not a startling range of emotional expression. In fact, I was all ready to dismiss her as another urban folkster in a thrift-store dress on the basis of *Los Angeles*, the twee first cut on *Roomful of Smoke*. Luckily, things start getting better right away with the tougher-sounding title track.

Stevens's wry sense of humour, her peripatetic sense of genre and the rootsy aptitude of her band (paired with the production savvy of David Bianco) made me stick around through the whole album to see what direction it would take next.

Winter Fugue sounds like a more dissolute Iris Dement heartbreaker with its post-barroom pleadings, while *My Tears are Wasted on You* is a perfect country waltz minus any trace of hokey sentiment. The sprightly *Don Juan* calls out an unrepentant rogue over vertiginous Gypsy-jazz violin, segueing in the horn-fuelled quasi-R&B of *Silly*. And that only gets you

to song seven of 13. Suffice it to say, I'm glad I hung in until the end.

— By Scott Lingley

Zoe Muth and The Lost High Rollers

Zoe Muth and The Lost High Rollers
(Independent)

While this disc has a very traditional country and bluegrass feel to it, what makes it stand a full head higher in the field compared to its neighbours is that the Washington state native has a really great country and western voice. I'm thinking that relaxed twang and drawl but with a cutting power that Patsy Kline or Loretta Lynn had. Really, it's that classic.

Also, producer David Dresel keeps the backing musicians in an equally classic mode. They solidly support, carry the tunes along with a weighty groove and swing, and add hot and tasteful flourishes where needed, but never overwhelm the singer or the song.

You've never heard of any of these players but, damn, they're good. You've never heard of Zoe Muth, either, but I'm betting you will. What a debut! One of the more pleasant surprises this listener has had in a while. If you want a damn fine country disc, try this one.

— By Barry Hammond

Dave Riley & Bob Corritore

Lucky To Be Living (Blue Witch Records)

You'll find three key players here—Dave Riley's deep-cut, gritty vocals, his stinging guitar, and Corritore's smooth-as-silk harmonica—playing loose, straight-ahead blues and clearly having a ball doing it. While Riley comes off

as rough-hewn, he's balanced perfectly by Corritore's skilful harp playing and beefy tone. Riley has adapted the lyric of Frank Frost's *Jelly Roll King* to honour the passing of Frost, Sam Carr and John Weston.

Various guests arrive to fatten up the sound, notably pianist Henry Gray and Chris James on guitar. Yet the magic happens on the stripped down numbers where Corritore and Riley play off each other, getting down to the raw roots of the genre. The aforementioned Weston's *Sharecropper Blues* and Riley's own *Country Rules* are highlights and good examples, as this simpatico pair transforms their relatively simple approach to music into something highly soulful, if not emotionally satisfying.

Or fire up the full band treatment of *Automobile* to get a true taste of how good blues is played. That's quite a coup for this second release, sounding like it could be their tenth. Which means they've taken something old, tired and true and made it new all over again.

— By Eric Thom

Martin Sexton

Sugarcoating (Kitchen Table Records)

It isn't news to anyone who has ever heard Martin Sexton that he is possessed of a singularly agile and soulful vocal apparatus, and all it would take is one chorus from *Found*, the lead-off track on his new album, to demonstrate that conclusively.

His songwriting, however, I'm less crazy about. For every poignant, piano-driven *Always Got Away*, with its undercurrent of gospel choir, there are a clutch of banal, regular-guy musings couched in easy-listening backdrops that call to mind the time-honoured folk traditions of Hootie and the

Blowfish. I'm not always so hot on the things he makes his marvellous voice do, whether it's the Bob and Doug MacKenzie-inspired yodelling on *Stick Around*, the goofy cowboy intonation of the frankly weird title track, or the risible shacklacka chorus of *Boom Sh-Boom*.

I'm sorry, but this is the kind of middle-brow, tucked-in T-shirt, socks-and-sandals, folk-fest fodder that sends me straight to the beer tent.

— By Scott Lingley

Peter Karp and Sue Foley

He Said She Said (Blind Pig)

When you think of singing couples, who comes to mind? Lee and Nancy? Sonny and Cher? Ike and Tina? It only works when something else results to the pairing that the artists could never achieve as individuals. Sue Foley can stand on her reputation but, for this reviewer, her vocals have always been her Achilles heel. Peter Karp, on the other hand, is a gifted singer. Add them together, however, and the contrast only serves to scuttle Foley's contribution.

Since the two have recently become one in a real-life relationship, having toured this show, the plot thickens yet the

results fall short of Burns and Allen. Chemistry is found on *Rules of Engagement*—both are exceptional guitarists, and the marriage of their two vocals here work well. Likewise, on the jazz-inflected *Scared*, where the late-night feel is reinforced by Foley's slightly boozy vocal, surrounded my muted horns.

Yet one listen to Foley's vocal on *Danger Lurks* should be enough to send Karp running for the hills. They are redeemed by the quite lovely *Valentine's Day*, wherein both singers turn in convincing, complimentary vocal performances against tasteful slide guitar. Even more ground is reclaimed by Karp's addictive country stomp, *Dear Girl*, and the utterly haunting *Lost In You*. All in all, an interesting collaboration, some solid songwriting and, possibly, an economical way to tour, but I'll hold out for solo records from both.

— By Eric Thom

Justin Rutledge

The Early Widows (Six Shooter)

Sounding at times not unlike Calexico's Joey Burns, Toronto's Justin Rutledge evokes a restrained melancholy on his fourth album—which isn't to say the record lacks balls. Producer Hawksley



Workman helps muster finely layered, occasionally surging settings for Rutledge's plaintive voice and wistful words, drawing on the likes of singers Suzie Ungerleider and Julie Fader, bassist Bazil Donovan, fiddler Jesse Zubot and other ace session players to give the tunes dramatic thrust.

Thus it takes a listen or two to realize the real stars are Rutledge's literate, melodic songs that evoke the harsh elements and landscapes stained by timeless struggle, regret and loss alluded to by the seafaring theme and parchment tones of the attractive album art.

In fact, the relatively rockin' *Mrs. Montgomery* arrives as a bit of a respite from the album's pervading afflicted tone. It's hard to see an album this emotionally fraught elevating Rutledge's profile on the national music scene, but it really ought to.

— By Scott Lingley

Yael Wand

Good Stitch Gone (Reduction Road)

Though born in Haifa, Israel, Yael Wand has been a British Columbia resident since the age of eight. Since releasing her debut solo disc, *Antinomy*, in 2004 and an EP, *Jerusalem*, in 2003, this artist, whose style covers as broad a range as her travels, has racked up some hefty praise from a number of critics on subsequent discs



Reviews

(both solo like 2006's *At Your Door* and on compilations).

After listening to this disc, anyone can see why. She has a quality that's hard to put your finger on but includes a seeming ease and space in the arrangements that makes her work seem mature and professional, completely familiar, and freshly surprising, all at the same time.

There are elements of folk, pop, jazz, old-timey bluegrass, classical and anything else you can think of, all anchored by a gorgeous voice with a great tone and superior playing by an array of instruments ranging from fiddle to trumpet, banjo to accordion, cello to kahon.

Part of the credit must go to Corwin Fox, the multi-instrumentalist/producer/engineer, who also mixed and mastered

the disc, but you also get the feeling that Wand knows exactly what she wants and is in full control of the proceedings. Some of this critic's favourite tracks were *Empty Page*, *Take Me To the Water*, and *The Only Play*, but they're all pretty great.

— By Barry Hammond

Angelo Spinazzola and Carlo Spinazzola

Release Independent

Cape Breton Island, specifically Sydney, NS, is the home of these two guitar-picking brothers who each contribute a disc to this two-disc set. Angelo came up in groups like Father John's Medicine Train, Green Eggs & Jam, and The Vintage Pickers before going solo. He then took a sabbatical from music to concentrate on his busi-

ness, North River Kayak Tours. His brother, Carlo, recorded his disc in 2003 with Angelo on harmonica and flute and some of the same musicians from his brother's disc helping out; he completed it shortly before taking his own life in November of that year.

Angelo decided to release his late brother's recording in this package alongside his own. The disc was actually a 2006 release but being nominated for the 2007 East Coast Music Award in the category of Roots/Traditional Recording of the Year has refocused attention on the set. Angelo's disc is a lively, pleasant-sounding, rootsy affair, with J.P. Cormier contributing on several tracks. The catchiest song is probably *The Way You Are Today*. Carlo's disc is a bluesier affair, softer in places,

but rougher, too, with darker colours, titles like *Raven*, *Reefer Hand* and *Black Dog* perhaps reflecting his state of mind at the time.

Still, the disc reveals him as a talent in his own right, especially on the melodic *Unborn Song*, and it's sad such promising ability didn't get to develop and mature. The set works as a snapshot and keepsake of two contrasting talents at a crossroads in their lives.

— By Barry Hammond

Morelove

All of My Lakes Lay Frozen Over
(Independent)

Morelove embody winter. The landscape of the listener's mind is snow covered, layered in sentiment and subtlety. *Views from Postdamn* wanders through a sleepy city as one takes stock of

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history and the modern adaptations we carry while trying to conjure up a new definition.

The male/female vocal play of Miss Emily Brown and Corwin Fox is a dynamic similar to Beach House and M. Ward and Zooey Deschanel's She & Him. Both multi-instrumentalists, the duo swap around playing on banjo, autoharp, rhodes, flugel-horn, sousaphone, glockenspiel, piano, mandolin and acoustic guitar.

The banjo-plucking ode *I'm Gone* stands out on the album as a confessional parting of ways. It's a song for a lazy day in the sun, or a fond farewell. The sombre yet transfixing *Hunter's Moon* aptly describes a night under the stars, dancing with the shadows and lingering with the possibility of what could be.

— By Shannon Webb-Campbell

Fergus

Green St. (*Independent*)

Fergus? A five-piece from Worcester, MA. The "new direction in Irish music" that they are apparently pioneering (says the band's website) includes renditions of the rarely heard *Rocky Road to Dublin*, *From Clare to Here*, and *P Stands for Paddy*. Need I say more?

No, I thought not.

— By Richard Thornley

Ewan Robertson

Some Kind of Certainty (*Greentrax*)

Ewan Robertson is a Strathspey-born singer and guitarist who plays with Scots band Breabach, with whom he graced the stage at last year's Edmonton Folk Music Festival. He won the 2008 BBC Radio Scotland Young Traditional Musician of the Year award, and was the first singer/guitarist to do so.

On this CD he sings two tradionals and covers songs by



Etran Finatawa

Etran Finatawa

Tarkat Taje - Let's Go! (*Riverboat*)

Rarely do we get to see so directly into the heart of traditional music. The band Etran Finatawa (Stars of Tradition) is comprised of two Tuareg and three Peuhl Wodaabe musicians, playing guitar and calabash percussion, singing, dancing and clapping elaborate patterns in a style that in recent years has been dubbed nomad blues.

Driving in my car with Etran Finatawa in the CD player, I found myself singing along with the call and response, the miles flying by, thinking, "Hey, this stuff works!"

With the exception of a 1989 Werner Herzog documentary called *Herdsmen of the Sun*, Wodaabe music has not entered the world stage before. But, singer Bagui Bouga states, traditional Wodaabe life has been disrupted.

In an interview the band gave in Los Angeles, he related, "We have written our own songs with nomads in mind; we sing about the problems we have. Before, we were fine: we had enough animals, we had pastures, we had rain. And then some years passed, there wasn't

any more rain. People lost practically all their animals and we had almost nothing. People went to the city in search of work, but they don't have education and they end up doing hard and difficult tasks for very little money."

The Wodaabe looked to the Tuaregs, "who had already modernized themselves, they had electric guitars. We started jamming with them, we played traditional songs, and new modern songs with the guitar. It was completely new for us. We have lived side by side for centuries, and we never thought about doing anything together, but we have found the solution in doing something together, without knowing if it would work."

Would it be possible to combine the two cultures? The answer has been an emphatic yes. *Let's Go!* is Etran Finatawa's third album, this time recorded at the state-of-the-art RealWorld studios in the midst of a European tour, at a high point of collaborative inspiration. What had been two separate strains in the previous album now begins to meld and become something of its own. The Wodaabe songs and



Ewan Robertson

Reviews

rhythms intertwine with the sinuous Tuareg guitar lines. True to their nomadic ways, the band has been travelling since its 2004 debut.

Searching for a way to survive under harsh new circumstances, Bouga vows, "We can't allow ourselves to forget the rich culture that we have, which has always helped us so much."

— By Lark Clark

Marshall Lawrence

Blues Intervention (Independent)

With his second acoustic release, *Blues Intervention*, Marshall Lawrence has teamed up with harmonica player Sherman (Tank) Doucette, who has played with many blues greats including John Lee Hooker, and Russell Jackson – a former member of the B.B. King Orchestra – on standout acoustic bass.

Steeped in the traditional '30s and '40s delta-style country blues and roots, *Blues Intervention*, from start to finish, is 13 tracks of pure delight. Marshall Lawrence, PhD (self professed "doctor of the blues") and past Maple Blues Award nominee, has more than enough qualifications to easily prescribe a big dose of acoustic blues – prairie style – with his throaty voice, well-crafted songs and exquisite resophonic guitar. *Blues Intervention* is a brilliant mix of storytelling and traditional blues.

— By Phil Harries

Delta Spirit

History From Below (Rounder Records)

As a San Diego five-piece, Delta Spirit started making waves touring with the Cold War Kids and Clap Your Hands

and Say Yeah, performing on *Late Night with Conan O'Brien* and *Last Call with Carson Daly*. Their third effort is perfectly timed as a summer release; it could very well soundtrack the season.

With stellar tracks like *Bushwick Blues*, *Salt in the Wound* and *Devil Knows You're Dead*, Delta Spirit are innovative indie rockers with a unique rhythmic twist. *White Table* is the album's pinnacle, as it heavily fuses drums and bass with a cocky love story gone askew.

Unlike Sarah Slean's piano ballad *St. Francis*, Delta Spirit's broody mod-rock anthem *St. Francis* is a song for anyone who has ever run away. The road never stretches long enough to answer the endless questions of the soul and meaning. The final note is *Ballad of*

Vitaly, a tragic song of history and longing.

— By Shannon Webb-Campbell

The Lark Rise Band

Lark Rise Revisited (Talking Elephant Records)

Playwright Keith Dewhurst dramatized Flora Thompson's novel, *Lark Rise to Candleford*, a vivid portrait of life in a rural community in Victorian England, for two National Theatre stage productions. He chose English folk veteran Ashley Hutchings to provide the music, which was played by The Albion Band. The same novel was recently adapted by BBC Television to huge acclaim.

And so, 30 years since its stage debut, Hutchings is back with this CD, inspired once again by this sentimental tale from a bygone age. There are ballads such as *Bonny Labour-*

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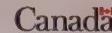
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ing Boy, nursery rhyme-like melodies such as *Poor Old Soldier*. Morris tunes and children's singing. It's all beautifully played and is not without its delicate charms. I can't imagine it being hugely popular however, except perhaps among fans of period drama, deep nostalgia and the preciously quaint. Flora Thompson will be gently revolving in her grave, smiling graciously throughout.

— By Tim Readman

The Avett Brothers

I and Love and You (American)

The Avett Brothers really are brothers and that they are still speaking and working together after more than a decade (unlike, say, the Gallaghers) is a good thing. I can't quite find the words to say why, but it seems to speak well of them as people and hence their music. Is this reading too much into things? Perhaps. Regardless.

Powerful songs here, some serious songwriting. Great hooks. Lots and lots of piano. Some acoustic stompers courtesy of *Slight Figure of Speech* and *Kick Drum Heart*. Elsewhere we are treated to oblique folk-pop majesty (the title track and *Laundry Room*). "I just saw a shooting star," they sing. Me, too.

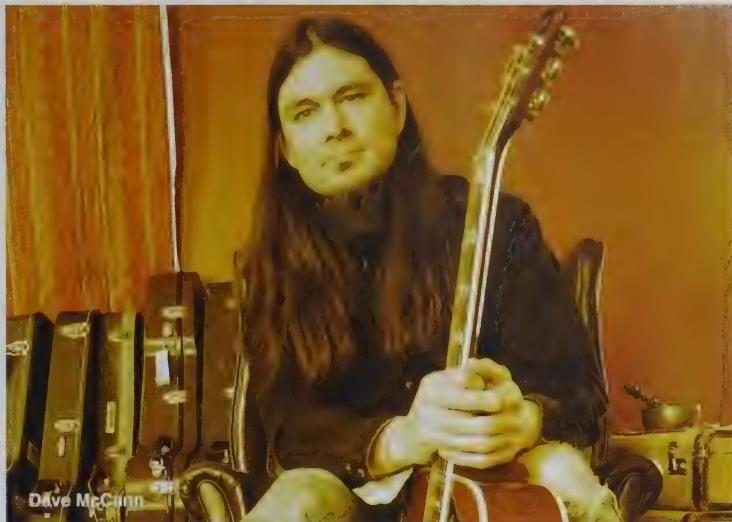
— By Richard Thornley

Sons of Noel and Adrian

Sons of Noel and Adrian (Willkommen Records)

As an experimental 12-piece folk band, Brighton, England's Sons of Noel and Adrian are inherently epic. Their self-titled, nine-track album is haunting, riddled with metaphor, and explores the shades of experience that create the human condition.

With a sound reminiscent of Wintersleep meets Fleet Foxes, Sons of Noel and Adrian are a stunning collection of players.



Indigo dives deep into the wilds of imagination, as if being lost at sea enveloped in fog; there is nowhere to turn but inward. The strongly instrumental *Damien/Lessons From What's Poor* journeys through the trees, as the narrative instrumentation builds into the song's larger tale, deep into the forest.

A song of moral and internal struggle, *Divorce* is a confessional song of heartbreak. It chronicles a man losing his wife and children and the sorrow he carries. *The Wreck is not a Boat* is the album's pinnacle, featuring whistles, horn, handclaps and a vocal singalong.

— By Shannon Webb-Campbell

Dave McCann and the Firehearts

Dixiebluebirds (Oldman River Music)

Dave McCann didn't take his seemingly requisite four years between records this time: it's only been two since he released *Shoot The Horse*. But this new and dizzying pace of production has not blunted the quality of his work. *Dixiebluebirds* is without question his finest re-

cord to date and will hopefully bring him some much-deserved exposure beyond Canadian borders.

Recorded in Nashville, this new album is undoubtedly more purely country-rock than anything McCann has done before but he retains plenty of the grit and fizz that made his early stuff so endearing, and his outlook as a songwriter has not changed much at all.

So we get a paean to the glories of the road on *Unfamiliar Ground*, the life well-lived on *Standing in the River*, and society's injustice on *Bloodpines*.

Prairie gothic? It's the musical

equivalent to a road movie, the night flecked with stars, your windshield spotted with bugs, and don't we just love it! To quote a hoary old '70s cliché, keep on rollin', Mr. McCann.

— By Richard Thornley

Sally Spring

Made of Stars (Sniffnupper Records)

Sally Spring certainly has the independent pedigree. She's been described as a "folk-rock marvel since the 1970s", and has worked with everyone from The Byrds, Doc Watson, Mama Cass, Rev. Gary Davis and Taj Mahal, and recorded with the likes of Jack Lawrence and



Spring

Reviews

Fernando Saunders.

Now working in North Carolina, she's got Fred Smith (Television) and Graham Maby (Natalie Merchant and Joe Jackson) playing in her band and is produced by drummer and guitarist Ted Lyons. The disc is mixed by Chris Stamey and has guest spots by Susan Cowsill, Gurf Morlix, Peter Holsapple (Continental Drifters, dB's, REM), Harvey Gold, Jim Mastro (Ian Hunter, Jayhawks) and Caitlin Cary (Tres Chicas, Whiskeytown). *Made of Stars*, indeed.

Not only has she got the background, she's got the talent: a memorable voice, fine songwriting, and original guitar playing. Check out this latest of her five recordings and you'll agree all the fuss is warranted. A pretty fine CD.

-By Barry Hammond

Canteen Knockout

Broken Down Town (weewerk.com)

Toronto alt-country rockers, led by singer/songwriter/rhythm-guitarist André Skinner, follow up their first disc, *Navajo Steel*, with this latest outing. Pedal steel player Alex Maksmiy, whose soaring tones are all over the disc, is a definite asset to an otherwise fairly straight-forward alt-country affair, especially on their version of Gordon Lightfoot's classic *The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald*.

Simplicity isn't always a drawback for a band and this group uses it as a definite strength, the bare-bones approach paying off in the solid architecture underlying most of the songs, such as standouts *Back in the Sun* and *Driving*. There's not too much that's

fancy or original here, but what they lay down is pretty solid. Miranda Mulholland embroiders some nice fiddle stitching into the fabric as well.

- By Barry Hammond

Aidan Knight

Versicolour (Adventure Boys Club)

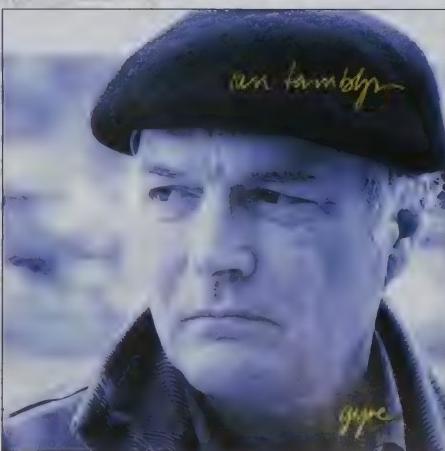
On *Versicolour*, singer/songwriter/multi-instrumentalist Aidan Knight fits more squarely into the niche of orchestral indie pop than the music you would expect to find covered in the pages of *Penguin Eggs*, but that's no reason to not explore his paradoxically intimate and grandiose songcraft for there is no shortage of beauty to discover therein. *Fighting Against Your Lungs* buoys up shivery lyrical imagery on swells of horns and keyboards rising under a steady thrum of acoustic

fingerpicking, leading into a mid-tempo instrumental outro capped by keening trumpet.

Many artists can't fit that many tasteful ideas into an entire album, never mind a single song, but Knight proves himself adept in this regard over the course of eight ostensibly simple ditties. Disarm your own compunctions with the gentle shuffle of *North East South West* with its shimmering underpinning of strings and sighing-wind vocals and strange, thrilling transformation into something more ornate and propulsive, or the hymnal harmonies of *Sorrows* that announce the pastoral loveliness intimated by *Jasper*.

Is it true "folk music"? To quote Satchmo, I ain't ever heard a horse sing a song yet.

- By Scott Lingley



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Reviews



The Chieftains with Ry Cooder (bottom left)

The Chieftains Featuring Ry Cooder

San Patricio (Concord Music)

Why did the chicken cross the road? To play with The Chieftains, of course. All right, all right, Paddy Maloney has taken enough stick for his endless dalliances with the likes of the Rolling Stones, Sting, Roger Daltrey and, for heaven's above, Tom bloody Jones. Moreover, the odd bit of tattle has hinted at Maloney losing his spark since the death of his long-standing musical ally, harpist Derek Bell.

So much for conjecture.

Astutely aided and abetted by Ry Cooder, *San Patricio* ranks alongside The Chieftains classics *IV* and *V*. A tightly knit concept album, it highlights the tragic story of Irish émigrés conscripted on arrival into the U.S. army during the Mexican-American War of 1846-1848. Maligning and mistreated in a conflict against fellow Catholics, many deserted to form the

San Patricio Battalion to fight alongside the Mexicans. At the conclusion of the war, many of the San Patricios were literally branded or executed as traitors. In Mexico, though, they are still honoured annually.

While The Chieftains briefly covered the theme of Irish military volunteers previously on *Bonaparte's Retreat*, it remained musically well within the traditional realms of their early LPs. The more ambitious *San Patricio* features a stellar international cast that includes Spanish piper Carlos Nuñez, Mexicans Lila Downs, 90-year-old ranchera singer Chavela Vargas, Los Tigres del Norte, Los Folkloristas, the Churubusco Pipe Band, Ireland's Moya Brennan and actor Liam Neeson, and Americans Linda Ronstadt, Los Lobos' David Hidalgo and Cesar Rosas, and San Francisco-based Los Cenzontles.

Despite the grim subject matter, the spirit of *San Patricio* proves largely uplifting with its

eclectic combination of traditional norteño, ranchera, tejano, bolero and mariachi songs and tunes bolstered by The Chieftains' Irish instruments.

More reflective pieces include Brennan's take on a *Lullaby for the Dead* and Cooder's *Sands of Mexico*. As daunting a production task as this surely was, it all flows together succinctly with the various musicians finding much common ground in the universality of their traditions. Only Neeson's spoken narration to *March To Battle* jars. It's a small part, though, on a recording of epic quality and interest.

— By Roddy Campbell

Post script: While the San Patricios were largely from Ireland, their ranks also included Scots. And it has been suggested that when the Mexicans heard the Scots repeatedly singing Robert Burns's song *Green Grow The Rushes O* they coined the term Gringo.

Steve Johnson

Lowlands (Borough South Music)

New York native Johnson presents us here with a collection of traditional songs, mainly from Ireland, with a few from Britain, Appalachia and the American Southwest. He is in esteemed company with the likes of Eamon O'Leary on guitar, bouzouki and banjo; Patrick O'Keefe on fiddle and Natalie Haas on cello as his accompanists.

He has a gentle, breathy voice, which he uses to great effect in performing these musical tales in a wonderfully understated way. He draws you in and beckons you to listen closer. The presiding mood is one of melancholy and the pace is slow. The arrangements are sparse and tasteful and frame his vocals perfectly. The material is well researched and the sleeve notes provide an interesting backdrop to the songs. A gem of a CD, from an unassuming yet mighty singer.

— By Tim Readman

Cam Penner

Trouble & Mercy (*Independent*)

When it comes to singer-songwriters, it's virtually stating a truism to say that some of them come across as more authentic than others. Cam Penner falls under the real-deal category. First of all, there's his history. Born in a Mennonite community in Manitoba to parents whose iconoclastic lifestyle was at odds with societal expectations and values, Penner's work résumé consists of having spent years helping the homeless and the marginalized. Such a background doesn't go hand in hand with talent but, given the fact that Penner is gifted, it undoubtedly adds a true-to-life dimension to his work. Penner's two previous full-length albums have been highly acclaimed

Reviews

among the Americana cognoscenti south of the border as well as in Europe.

Trouble & Mercy was recorded almost immediately after getting back from a six-month tour. His band took a break so the arrangements are more pared down than usual, although Jon Wood, his side-kick, and a few other musicians offer first-class accompaniment on some tracks. Several of Penner's new songs, including *Roam* and *Tired of this Town*, reflect the artist's wanderlust nature while *I3* is a powerful song about a convict. The difference in their respective lifestyles, characters and fates notwithstanding, in terms of sheer talent and musical style Cam Penner comes across as Canada's Blaze Foley.

— By Paul-Emile Comeau

Rakish Angles

Rakish Angles (*Independent*)

The Sunshine Coast as known as the land of Bruno Gerussi, beaches and late ferries, and it can add one of Canada's most progressive string bands to the list.

The Rakish Angles—a name taken from Dickens—play a recipe that consists of Gypsy swing, newgrass and a dollop of salsa. This 13-song totally instrumental offering is somewhat reminiscent of early Zubot and Dawson material, and slide guitar ace Steve Dawson guests on three tracks.

There's great interplay between the players, especially between mandolinist Simon Hocking and fiddler Serena Eades, and some great writing. They can speed along on tunes like *Breakwater*, catching some

pretty melody in *Dan and Mischa's Wedding*. *Big Town Swing* is almost good enough to become part of the standard Gypsy repertoire.

The band shows more than a little promise. It was nominated as the instrumental group of the year in the Canadian Folk Music Awards. Hopefully the Angles will soon be able to catch a ferry and take their music to the rest of Canada.

— By Mike Sadava

Bernie Gilmore

Oil Boom! Music to Celebrate the Canadian Quest for Oil (*Independent*)

Bernie Gilmore is the type of veteran journeyman folksinger who can be found in most small cities throughout North America. In other words, he's been around a long time but he isn't distinctive enough to acquire

much more than a local following, although he generally knows how to make the best of his talent. His album of 2005 was produced by Bill Garrett while his latest was produced by James Gordon. The band also included Geordie and Evan Gordon. More important, the Canadiana theme of the album is bound to garner a certain amount of attention.

The 10 songs, all written or co-written by Gilmore except for Alex Sinclair's *Nitroglycerin*, tell the story of the first discovery of oil in North America (in Lambton County, ON) and of industry pioneers and the processes of oil production and refinement. In 2008, Petrolia and Oil Springs (west of London, ON) celebrated the 150th anniversary of the black gold frenzy that took place

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Reviews

in that area. The songs, such as *Oil Was Found in Canada First*, deal mostly with history and don't purport to offer any great geopolitical insights into the reliance on oil as an energy source. *Oil Boom!* serves rather as a commemorative album, one that is being sold in a local oil museum and one that could be a useful tool in teaching history. Fans of Tamarack should also find *Oil Boom!* of interest.

— By Paul-Emile Comeau

Xarnege

*ixo*sho* (Collectif Pyrène)

There are more nations and cultures in Europe than we ever knew. Xarnege (looks like carnage, only with an X! Even cooler!) is actually pronounced shar-NEG-eh and the album title, *ixo*sho*, translates as "Be quiet and listen!" The music draws upon the ancient roots of Gascony in southwest France and the Basque country in northeast Spain.

These two regions, divided, or rather united, by the Pyrenees, share a common culture and Xarnege aims to draw it forth into the modern world. The band's members come from both sides of the mountain range and bring long experience with the specialized traditions of their two areas.

Never was the term multi-instrumentalist so apt. Masters of the boha, flabuta, xirula and ttun-ttun, the very names ring

with esoteric exoticism. These are blended with bagpipes, fiddle and bouzouki to create music sounding like first cousins to Celtic and Scandinavian folk tunes.

There's plenty of attitude with edgy string solos and an almost heavy metal hurdy-gurdy. Though I didn't recognize a word of the lyrics, I could swear I've met the monsters, murderers and lovers these ballads evoke.

Production values are great and arty black-and-white close-ups of the hurdy-gurdy tell us this is no backwoods band. I'd love to know how many people can read the album notes, which, with the exception of one paragraph, are written exclusively in Basque and Gascon.

— By Lark Clark

Little Johnny England

Ten Years On (Talking Elephant Records)

Little Johnny England are Gareth Turner (melodeons), P.J. Wright (guitars), Guy Fletcher (fiddle), Hugh Bunker (bass), and Mark Stevens (drums). They all pitch in on vocals. Their material is almost all self-written and draws heavily from traditional English songs for its themes and melodies.

Their arrangements are flavoured with dollops of classic British rock, with influences like Led Zeppelin, Cream and Wishbone Ash in evidence, as

well as folk-rockers such as The Oyster Band and Steeleye Span.

This retrospective double CD compilation includes unreleased material, live tracks and rarities from the last decade. The first CD is lighter fare but the second rocks pretty hard. There's a few crackers in here, notably the prog rock-ish *Ranjer Mile*, which wouldn't be out of place on a Gentle Giant release.

This is their first recording in seven years and is sure to bring out the fan club to welcome them back with open arms.

— By Tim Readman

The Lark Rise Band

Lark Rise Revisited (Talking Elephant Records)

Playwright Keith Dewhurst dramatized Flora Thompson's novel, *Lark Rise to Candleford*, a vivid portrait of life in a rural community in Victorian England, for two National Theatre stage productions. He chose English folk veteran Ashley Hutchings to provide the music, which was played by The Albion Band. The same novel was recently adapted by BBC Television to huge acclaim.

And so, 30 years since its stage debut, Hutchings is back with this CD, inspired once again by this sentimental tale from a bygone age. There are ballads such as *Bonny Labouring Boy*, nursery rhyme-like melodies such as *Poor Old Soldier*, Morris tunes and children's singing. It's all beau-



Steve Johnson

tifully played and is not without its delicate charms. I can't imagine it being hugely popular however, except perhaps among fans of period drama, deep nostalgia and the preciously quaint. Flora Thompson will be gently revolving in her grave, smiling graciously throughout.

— By Tim Readman

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Xarnege

Reviews

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Angles will soon be able to catch a ferry and take their music to the rest of Canada.

— By Mike Sadava

Jay Aymar

Halfway Home (*Independent*)

Jay Aymar first came to the public's attention in 1993 when he answered a CBC Radio casting call for new artists across Ontario. His songs were selected for a five-song demo. Since then, he's written and recorded four more albums and performed live at venues across the country. Ian Tyson recorded his song from this disc, *My Cherry Coloured Rose*, about hockey broadcasting icon Don Cherry's late wife on his disc *Yellowstone and Other Love Stories*.

He frequently gets compared to John Prine or Lyle Lovett for his "homemade" songs, but this critic also hears a little of

Leonard Cohen in his soft, low-key delivery. The songs on this disc cover a wide range, from light-hearted fare like *Apple Pickin'* to more serious subjects like Darwin and religion in *All I Know*, dead hobos and street people in *Crow*, dead soldiers and rooming houses on *Carry Me Back Home* and survival of the fittest on *Easy Street*.

Chris Hess does a fine production and engineering job, keeping things simple and transparent to show off the songs in their best light without burying them under ostentatious decoration. There are very attractive backing harmonies on some of these numbers, too, especially those provided by Jadea Kelly. A good disc for singers to swipe some new songs from and yet another nice effort from Jay Aymar.

— By Barry Hammond

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Reviews

Mindy Smith

Stupid Love Vanguard Records

Mindy Smith's fourth disc, following *One Moment More* (2004), *Long Island Shores* (2006) and *My Holiday* (2007), may be her most musically accomplished yet. The production team of Ian Fitchuk and Justin Loucks, who co-produce with Smith, play many of the instrumental parts on the disc, leaving her free to concentrate on singing her songs about the many facets of love.

And sing she does: the Long Island native is in fine voice on this collection. It's the quality of honesty in Smith's voice and the above-average quality of her songwriting that have set her apart from the scores of other singer-songwriters since she caught the public's attention with her cover of Dolly Parton's *Jolene* in 2003 and her own *Come To Jesus* in 2004. To be fair, she has a little help on this disc from the likes of Thad Cockrell, Amy Grant, Jeremy Lister and Vince Gill, as well as guitarist Daniel Tashian, but mostly it's Smith front and centre. She seamlessly blends together country and folk with upbeat pop to come up with a pleasing recipe that has its fingers in many pies. While the taste may not be terribly original, or for the gourmet, it's still a pretty wholesome, lip-smacking dish.

— By Barry Hammond



Mindy Smith



Willy Porter

Willy Porter

How to Rob a Bank (Weasel Records)

It seems that since 1990, Wisconsin's Willy Porter has been quietly practising his trade around the world and flying, to this point at least, under my radar. His new album, *How To Rob A Bank*, his sixth, has changed all that.

Mr. Porter is an extremely accomplished guitar player and shows it in every song as his acoustic guitar is front and centre in the mix—as it should be. Musically, he jumps genres yet maintains a characteristic sound.

He also covers a lot of ground, lyrically. From interpersonal relationships filtered through experienced eyes, to a heart grabbing story about a military family, and, in keeping with these times, a terrific look into corruption in big business and politics.

He is a master wordsmith and storyteller. Check out the title track:

"I'll get some decent business suits and a bogus business plan / Become well-versed in the etiquette of Wall Street Disneyland / Hit the country clubs eating peanuts and drinking Scotch / I'll talk the recent trends and

fart into a velvet couch / That's how you rob a bank"

There isn't a dud on *How To Rob A Bank*.

Willy Porter is new discovery for me—a very good one. And if you already know of him, this album's a keeper.

— by les siemieniuk

S.G. Sennicks

Red Meat and Blue 888 (Independent)

The first thing you notice is his voice. Sennicks's hearty, country-coloured vocal—reinforced by a solid rhythm section, driven by tasty mandolin and some haunting B3—is radio-ready and highly absorbing. And, just before you have him pegged as some *No Depression* wannabe, the mandolins propel him into Celtic turf as *The Colours* erupts into a tidy, Pogues-ish call to rebellion.

The addition of banjo, harmonica and lyrical irreverence marks this Ontario-bred performer as a bit of a rebel and a musical chameleon. *Well-heeled Man* triggers visions of Great Big Sea as the bodhrans start thumping but the passion in Sennicks's vocal has more in common with a sober Shane McGowan while his militant lyr-

ics suggest a passion for punk.

His third release, it deserves better packaging and much greater attention as you'd not expect to find such jewels within. *Myself Again* is worth its weight, the perfect folk-pop song packed with small town observations for a rainy afternoon, while he channels Billy Bragg via Ireland on *Franklin Co. Queen*.

Kudos to the simpatico surroundings crafted by Michael Boguski (keyboards, accordion), Randall Hill (mandolin, banjo, Dobro) and Shelley Woods (bass). One hell of a smart find from our own backyard.

— By Eric Thom

Phil Ochs, James Taylor and Joni Mitchell

Amchitka (Greenpeace)

As a fundraiser the first time around, on Oct. 16, 1970, at the Pacific Coliseum in Vancouver, this concert was a good idea that raised funds for a ship named Greenpeace that shortly after sailed to Amchitka Island and stopped U.S. underground nuclear testing. It also launched a generation's worth of protests that still go on today under the Greenpeace franchise.

This two-disc set is a collection of fine songs from Mr. Ochs, Mr. Taylor and Ms. Mitchell, arguably maybe at their prime: Mr. Ochs previous to his descent into madness that ended in 1976, Mr. Taylor in the glow of the phenomenal success of his first album, *Sweet Baby James*, and Ms. Mitchell just months away from releasing *Blue*.

And as a fundraiser for Greenpeace today, the re-release of the original mono recording of the concert is still a very good idea. It's a lovely live recording of three great artists, is a historical record and a reminder

Reviews

that details may change over the years but the main things do not.

— by les siemieniuk

The Sadies

Darker Circles (Outside Music)

Like anxious fishermen do we fans of the Sadies await each new CD. Not in any glassy-eyed religious sense, but with the knowledge this band and its brothers Good will deliver something new, a glimpse into their curiosity-laden journey through rock and roll (which some lazy listeners still mistake as being centred on the spaghetti soundtracks of Ennio Morricone). As the Sadies' latest, *Darker Circles* is rabid with proto-Sabbath groove and admissions of aging, for starters. Moving out further, there is a jangly song called *Postcards* that summons Tom Petty, drift-



ing into the room like lurking incense. Country? Rock? Does it matter?

Despite the album title, I wouldn't say this is the Sadies' darkest work — amid the 11 numbers there is a feeling of complete confidence which actually contradicts the spirit of lines like, "*Here's to the lucky ones — let's drink to better days ... Nothing is nothing. And everything's so far away.*" Ouch. Sounds like someone got hurt. *Choosing to Fly* is another

about girl troubles, leaving them behind but not really. Ralph Peer vintage as all hell, all violins and dusty floorboards. We should nod to Gary Louris for his overall production, more subtle here than the swooping Jayhawks ever mustered, as soothsing as they were.

Getting back to the glowing introduction of this review, it amazes me to the edge of a suspicion in black magic pacts how solidly this band's albums sit, amid distortion pedals and

somewhat relevant psychedelia. Even a coasting number like *Idle Tomorrows* just kills you as everyone involved steps forward individually and reminds you of whatever your favourite highway is, that sense of direction, built on its dead. The album closes with the instrumental *10 More Songs*, one for the sunset outlaws and hopefully more a promise of future work than the testimony to exhaustion its title could imply.

By Fish Griwkowsky

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Various Artists

Putumayo Presents Rhythm & Blues

(Putumayo)

The sturdy Putumayo label has consistently shown good judgment with their world-and-otherwise music samplers and this collection of "retro-R&B" is a marked exception to their track record of producing "perfect party platters". This is one of their best, given the fact that the R&B pioneered by those first marrying blues and gospel, soul and pop rendered it so timelessly that today's artists are reaching back to breathe fresh life into it.

From New York's funk-fuelled Cracked Ice to a surprisingly soulful Ruthie Foster; a marriage of new to old as K'eb Moore, Angie Stone and Sam Moore rework *Wang Doodle*; to veterans Irma Thomas and Henry Butler delivering one of the disc's most memorable numbers—this is some of the best 40 minutes you'll ever spend ... and summer's only begun.

– By Eric Thom

Various Artists

Barrelhouse Blues: Location Recording and the Early Traditions of the Blues

(Document Records)

Fans of the early blues owe a debt of gratitude to Paul Oliver for compiling *Barrelhouse Blues: Location Recording and the Early Traditions of the Blues*.

This three-disc, 68-track anthology is a wonderful treasure trove of mostly obscure blues performers recorded across the South in the 1920s and 1930s. Record company representatives hauled recording gear to hotel rooms and makeshift studios in places like Atlanta, Dallas, Memphis and New Orleans.

To quote the Document



Mississippi John Hurt

Records press release, "To preserve the music they brought in street singers, medicine show performers, pianists from the juke joints and barrelhouses. The music that circulated through southern work camps, prison farms and vaudeville shows would have vanished if it hadn't been captured on location by these performers and their recorders."

There are some recognizable names such as Memphis Minnie, Mississippi John Hurt and Blind Lemon Jefferson but many are not.

The songs have been cleaned up and the sound quality is surprisingly good considering the times and circumstances

under which the recordings were made.

This fine collection is a companion to a book of the same name by Paul Oliver.

– By Doug Swanson



Various Artists

Rounder Records 40th Anniversary Concert DVD (Rounder Records)

Hosted by the surprisingly musically talented actress/singer Minnie Driver, this concert is a mix of an all-star concert at the Grand Ole Opry House featuring Alison Krauss and Union Station with Jerry Douglas, Béla Fleck (who teams with both Douglas and Abigail Washburn), Mary Chapin Carpenter, Irma Thomas, and Nanci and the Zydeco Cha Chas, mixed with performances of Robert Plant and Alison Krauss taken from CMT's *Crossroads* TV show, a Madeleine Peyroux concert in Los Angeles, and Steve Martin's appearance at

the Ryman Auditorium during his 2009 *The Crow* tour, all in honour of Rounder Records' 40th birthday.

The four locales are blended smoothly into one great concert on this DVD to pay tribute to Marian Leighton Levy, Ken Irwin and Bill Nowlin, the founders of Rounder Records, who are all interviewed in the extras, along with most of the principle artists.

It's a pretty impressive array of talent, captured in some musically sublime moments and backed by an equally talented bunch of session players, only a few of which are Kenny Vaughn, Harry Stinson and Rami Jaffee (from The Wallflowers) in the Opry section; T-Bone Burnett, Marc Ribot and Buddy Miller in the Crossroads segment; Henry Butler in the Irma Thomas numbers; and Larry Klein in the Madeleine Peyroux part.

This quality of players is one of the elements that has most defined Rounder as a small label that has loomed large when it comes to talent in American



T Bone Burnett

Reviews

music. Equally talented are the camera, sound crews, the editor, and director James Burton Yockey, who so fluidly and crisply captured these historic concerts and put them together for this DVD package.

—By Barry Hammond

Jeff Healey and the Jazz Wizards

DVD: Beautiful Noise (Stony Plain)

Originally a live performance taped for TV back in '06, the much-beloved Canadian icon is seen in comparably good health and sporting his patented smile, good humour and impassioned playing—but follows a path less travelled by so many of his blues-rock fans.

You could easily say the early jazz of the '20s and '30s was Jeff's guilty pleasure, except that he was equally moti-

vated in educating the world in the untold pleasures of Bix Beiderbecke, Louis Armstrong and Jelly Roll Morton. Joined by Terra Hazelton on vocals, Christopher Plock (soprano and alto sax, vocals), Drew Jurecka (violin, sax), Jesse Barksdale (guitar), Colin Bray (bass), Reide Kaiser (piano), Gary Scriven (drums) and Ross Wooldridge (clarinet), and tastefully produced by Daniel Berman and Paul McNulty, this 57-minute show presents a moment—and style of music—from time.

The genre-skipping Healey is seen sharing a respectful space with his hand-picked musicians while demonstrating the considerable chemistry that existed between the band and his audience. Is there any greater accomplishment than this? To

think that Jeff could so effortlessly communicate the joy inherent in any style of music played well, and with passion, serves as ample epitaph—enough to keep Jeff's infectious smile from ever fading.

Countless highlights underline the series' title: a beautiful noise, indeed.

—By Eric Thom

Leonard Cohen

Blu-ray DVD: Live at The Isle of Wight 1970 (Columbia Records)

This Blu-ray is the footage that filmmaker Murray Lerner shot at the 1970 Isle of Wight festival of Cohen's set mixed with some modern (2009) interview footage of Kris Kristofferson (who was there and can be seen clapping along at the side of the stage), Bob Johnson (Cohen's manager at the time, who put

together the band for the festival and plays keyboards, guitar and harmonica), Judy Collins (who first recorded Cohen's songs), and Joan Baez (who had tried to calm a raucous and unruly crowd earlier at the festival) to put the set in context.

Cohen had gone on very late (well after 2 a.m.) because they'd had to find another keyboard. The one they were supposed to use had been burned, as had some of the stage scaffolding during an earlier set by Jimi Hendrix). The crowd wasn't in a good mood and had torn down the fences surrounding the site and earlier booted Kris Kristofferson offstage.

Cohen had been woken up to play. Kristofferson relates in the interview footage that he'd first come out of his trailer in his pyjamas and had taken his

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time getting to the stage. He's unshaven and dressed in a faded khaki safari jacket and pants.

His calm power as a performer comes through, however, because from the opening, where he talks the crowd through a story about his father taking him to the circus and asks them to light matches so he can see them (was this the first of such rituals with lighters, candles, or cellphones that have become such a rock cliché?) to his first number, his soothing, low, relaxing voice seems to hypnotize the crowd and he has them (and us) under his spell for the remainder of the set.

The film quality is surprisingly good with only some slight sparkle here and there and a fine thin scratch on his close shot during *Suzanne*. The sound is also pretty decent. The shots consist of a lot of close-ups of Cohen and some medium views so we can see him playing guitar, interspersed with shots of the band onstage, the ethereal hippy backup singers, and the crowd, with young 1970s faces staring up at him in awe, with other context footage.

The band includes the later-to-be-famous-on-his-own Charlie Daniels on fiddle and guitar. There's about 10 or 12 songs with some of his hits (the aforementioned *Suzanne*, *Bird On A Wire*, *The Stranger*

Song, Hey That's No Way To Say Goodbye and others of the period) taken at various lengths, and although the running time is a rather short 64 minutes and seven seconds, with no extras, it's a pretty nice historical package.

— By Barry Hammond

Madeleine Peyroux

Something Grand (DVD) (Rounder)

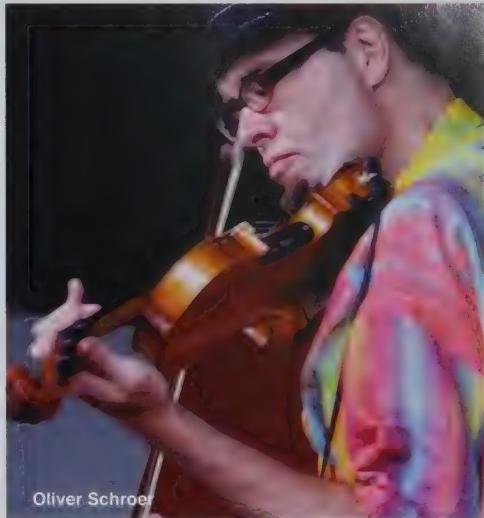
From busking on the streets of Paris to headlining at an intimate club in L.A., Madeleine Peyroux has done the impossible. And in the process she's created a niche of her own making. Fans of Billie Holiday are instantly attracted yet her appeal has broadened as she's moved beyond covering Edith Piaf, Leonard Cohen and Patsy Cline to arrive at her own very personal voice. The result is artfully displayed across the 17 songs recorded here (predominantly taken from *Bare Bones*), while an additional collection of five bonus acoustic performances underlines her growth as an individual performer.

A BBC-produced documentary is included, filling in the blanks and delving deeper into the artist behind this uniquely individual voice. But the quality of this concert footage, artfully rendered, is more than worth the price alone. Despite an all-star cast of musicians on stage (Larry Klein, Dean Parks, Lisa Germano), deft camera work and subtle lighting provides Peyroux with the intimacy her music demands as she interprets Dylan (*You're Gonna Make Me Lonesome When You Go*), Cohen (*Dance Me To The End of Love*) and Gainsbourg (*La Savanaise*) but it's her own co-written material that hits the strongest chords, *Something Grand* and *You Can't Do Me to Name a Few*.

— By Eric Thom



Madeleine Peyroux



Oliver Schroer

DVD: Silence at the Heart of Things

Featuring Oliver Schroer

Directed and written by Ellen Thalenberg

(Pilmotion International)

Oliver Schroer, Canadian composer and fiddle legend, died after a battle with leukemia in 2009 at the age of 52. He was a truly original musician who wrote and recorded hundreds of tunes in all sorts of styles, from jazz to classical, from Celtic to bluegrass, from straight ahead to deliciously twisted.

This film is centred on his incredibly productive musical period just prior to his passing, which included many recording sessions, some around his hospital bed. It also included a farewell concert at Trinity St. Paul's Church in Toronto, which was billed by the man himself as "Oliver's Last Concert on His Tour of This Planet". It is heavily featured in this film and it gives us an insight into his affable nature, his mischievous sense of fun, his pioneering musical approach and his love of the off-kilter.

His playing says it all. We see

him play behind the bridge, on the wood and in every other way imaginable, in search of the grit he always said was lacking in plain old violin playing, as he hewed out of the "fractal melodies" he took such joy in creating.

His gift for teaching others, not only how to play the fiddle but how to love music and to express themselves, was astonishing and is in evidence throughout the movie. Sadly there isn't much in the way of other footage to draw from, so we don't get a real insight into Oliver's life, as we would in a biographical film. Also the film was put together in a hurry, on borrowed time and called-in favours.

Nonetheless, to those of us who met him and to those who may never have heard of him, this is a brilliant way to both get to know and to remember the man. Loreena McKennitt's quote about Oliver adorns the cover of this DVD and perhaps sums it up best: "Oliver Schroer was an extraordinary artist and human being. The legacy of his

Reviews

music and nobility of his spirit are gifts to all of us."

- By Tim Readman

Various Artists

Country's Greatest Stars Live: Volumes I & II (Shout Factory)

For the most part, today's country music only serves to make you miss yesterday's country music pioneers all the more, and this two-volume, four-DVD goldmine is the perfect salve for any hurtin' heart.

Despite somewhat cheesy packaging, this treasure trove of country greats, both living and otherwise, sends you back to the glory days when there was lots of talent packed under those big hats and bigger hair. A combined total of 86 performances—culled from a two-part, seven-hour television special—this is a who's who

of artists paying tribute to "50 years of country music" from the stage of Nashville's Grand Ole Opry.

Originally aired in 1978, it's a showcase hosted by the era's biggest stars: Glen Campbell, Charley Pride, Eddy Arnold, Dolly Parton and Tennessee Ernie Ford, with standout performances by everyone from Lester Flatt and the Nashville Grass to Roger Miller, Gary Stewart, Ray Price and Merle Haggard.

True, the production calibre is somewhat canned and dusty and the set designs and fashions are hideous but it's a phenomenal flashback to a magical time. Too countless to list, highlights include Charlie Rich's *Behind Closed Doors*, Merle Haggard fronting Bob Wills's Texas Playboys, and glimpses of Gary

Stewart and a youthful Asleep At The Wheel.

And, for those who may have forgotten that Campbell once sported the best sideburns in Nashville and that Anne Murray once wore the worst pantsuits ever, this is a wonderful romp in the wayback machine.

- By Eric Thom

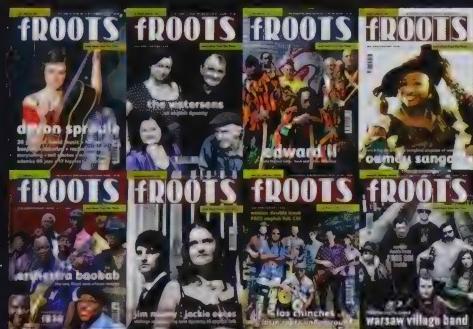


Barrelhouse Blues: Location Recording and the Early Traditions of the Blues

By Paul Oliver

ISBN: 978-0-465-00881-0 Basic Books/Persis Books
Group/228 pages/\$31.95

The origin of this book began in two lectures that Paul Oliver was invited to give by the Dubois Institute of African and African-American Studies at Harvard University in February 2007: the Alain Leroy Locke lecture series. Locke, a professor of philosophy at Howard University, was the first black Rhodes scholar. He had degrees from Howard University and Oxford University and he had



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Reviews



also studied in Berlin. He had written in the *Anthology of American Negro Literature* edited by V.F. Calverton in 1929 and a few years later, in 1936, wrote his own *The Negro and His Music*.

Oliver, himself an eminent writer and scholar on the history of the blues (with such credits as *Conversation with the Blues*, *The Story of the Blues*, and *Blues Fell This Morning* and who published his first article in *Jazz Journal* in 1951), quotes Locke at the beginning

of the book and attempts to answer some of the questions posed by Locke's books in his own writing.

Oliver is surprised that despite Locke's abilities at research and the contribution of a list of recorded items by a colleague, Professor Sterling Brown, Locke himself seemed unfamiliar with recorded blues when he was writing his books. Oliver finds this odd as many of the major commercial recording companies, such as Columbia, Victor, Okeh, Vocalion, ARC,

Bluebird and also the Library of Congress, were recording the work of early blues, proto-blues, hillbilly, folk and old-time singers and performers on the so-called "race records" as early as 1923 and until the beginning of the Second World War. Those wares were extensively advertised in black newspapers.

Besides recording such artists in their studios in major centres like New York and Chicago, these companies had an extensive program of location recording in southern states like Louisiana, Missouri, Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia and the Carolinas. Oliver takes a detailed look at these location recording programs and the artists and recorded songs they produced in light of Locke's questions.

As the reader might imagine, with a background like that, this book is more of a scholarly work than one aimed at the general reader. However, for anyone with a keen interest in the history of the blues there is much to recommend here. Oliver includes many brief biographical details of early recording artists like Blind Willie McTell, Lonnie Johnson, Lucille Bogan, Speckled Red, The Mississippi Sheiks, Ethel Waters, Bessie Smith, Peg Leg

Howell, Memphis Minnie McCoy, Lillian Glinn, De Ford Bailey (the only black performer to work with the Grand Old Opry at the time), Walter (Furry) Lewis, Ishman Bracey and Barbecue Bob.

If nothing else, it's worth it for the photographs alone, many of which were taken by Oliver himself of the still-living artists in the 1960s and 1970s, and the reproductions from newspaper ads of the 1920s and '30s. Oliver also publishes and comments on many of the lyrics and his insights on development of lyric forms are extremely interesting. If the book suffers from a tendency to seem like a log book of recording dates and places and times, it's balanced by the colourful personalities of the period performers and Oliver's obvious love of his subject. On the whole, a worthwhile addition to any blues enthusiast's library.

— By Barry Hammond



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Reviews

Cigar Box Banjo — Notes on Music and Life

By Paul Quarrington Greystone Books 243

ppm \$30.00

Halfway through last year Paul Quarrrington was diagnosed with Stage 4 lung cancer; there is no Stage 5. It was a surprise; he was feeling okay, except for some shortness of breath and a croaking voice, which got worse the longer he sang; he was, he thought, a bit out of shape. In fact, he was out of time.

Quarrington was the singer in the band Porkbelly Futures; he had toured and recorded with Joe Hall and with Quarrington-Worthy, but more Canadians knew him as an author. *Whale Music* won a Governor General's Award (and was made into a movie); he won the Stephen Leacock Medal for *King Leary*; his last novel was *The Ravine*, long-listed for the Giller Prize.

So, early last year, he submitted a slim volume about his involvement in music called *The Song* to his publishers. They liked it well enough, but figured he could do some more work on it; perhaps he could include some more "personal stuff."

Rewriting The Song — he renamed it *Cigar Box Banjo* — was just one of the things he did after he learned that

his life had a finite limit, perhaps six months. (He also finished a solo album, took part in a documentary about his life, wrote some new songs for Porkbelly Futures and went on tour with them).

It is a remarkable book, albeit occasionally uneven; his chapters on music — there's a nice segment about the blues, for instance — are mingled with hilarious anecdotes about his family and friends and the musicians he played with.

But it's really a story about bravery and energy; in six months, Quarrington delivered a lifetime's worth of quality work. There's a CD/DVD that comes with the book, and it contains a demo of a song called *Hello Jim*. It's about a sign on a church in downtown Toronto that, for years, used to read: "The End is Near — Call Jim," with a phone number. "The end IS near," Quarrington sings. As the demo stumbles to an end, he shouts, "Perfect!" And three days later, on January 21, he died. He was 56.

Note: For six months in 2008, Richard Flohil's company handled publicity — and wrote background and biographical material — for Porkbelly Futures.



Porkbelly Futures: Paul Quarington second from left

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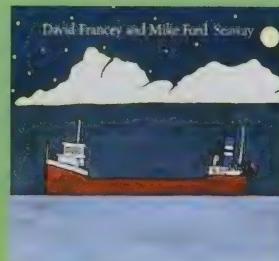
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Le Quartier Français



Les Tireux d' Roches

Au-delà des limites

Cheese graters et Jethro Tull jouent un petit rôle dans la recherche des Tireux d' Roches de nouvelles manières d' aborder les thèmes intemporels de la guerre et du recyclage. Yves Bernard estime qu'ils sont le futur de la musique traditionnelle au Québec.

Toute leur inspiration vient de la musique traditionnelle du Québec et ils l'assument pleinement. Mais dans ce monde, ils sont pourtant en marge. Lorsqu'ils se produisent dans les événements de chanson, ils ne ressemblent à personne et même dans les festivals trad, ils sortent aussi du lot. Ils sont peut-être les seuls à ne pas utiliser le violon et ne comptent pas en ajouter prochainement. Ils le remplacent plutôt par la flûte, le violoncelle, les saxophones et maintenant la clarinette. En plus, ils battent leurs cadences avec des percussions du monde et ponctuent leurs mélodies d'harmonica, de guitare, de banjo et de bouzouki.

Les Tireux viennent de lancer *Cé qu'essé?*, un excellent disque qui marquera

peut-être un tournant dans le trad québécois à l'aube d'une nouvelle décennie. Ponctué de chansons à répondre, de turluttes et de reels ralenti, l'album révèle de forts beaux moments entre relâchement et tension, tristesse et drôlerie, chansons et swing. La première pièce *Quarts de clous* fait apparaître le côté loufoque d'une chanson qui peut se donner des accents forains et qui peut même rappeler aussi bien la fanfare que la musique actuelle, mais dans sa version la plus mélodique.

Et de tous les disques des Tireux, *Cé qu'essé* est celui qui se rapproche le plus du swing. Cela à cause de la participation du nouveau percussionniste David Robert qui a remplacé Francis D'Octobre, un auteur compositeur qui mène dorénavant sa propre carrière. «Francis travaillait davantage l'enveloppe sonore des rythmes qu'il créait, alors que David apporte un jeu plus agressif et travaille avec toutes sortes d'accessoires qui s'ajoutent au cajon et au djembe. Dans quelques pièces, il utilise même de la râpe à fromage. Mais il demeure un percussionniste et non un batteur. Il joue tout avec ses mains», explique Denis Massé, le chanteur, guitariste et accordéoniste du groupe.

Au swing très consistant, s'ajoutent les solistes, beaucoup plus présents que dans les disques précédents. «L'harmonica, l'accordéon et à la flûte tracent le plus

souvent les lignes mélodiques de nos pièces, mais tous les musiciens trouvent leur place dans l'album», poursuit Denis. Parfois, le son de la flûte traversière évoque même le son prog d'un groupe comme Jethro Tull. L'analogie fait sourire Denis. «En répétition, on se paye la traite encore plus. C'est normal, on est tous dans la quarantaine et on a baigné dans le prog. Mais on est constamment à la recherche de nouveaux arrangements et d'anti-climax. On veut trouver les détours pour ne pas tomber dans la redondance, comme cela peut parfois devenir le cas avec les reels et les chansons à répondre».

Avec leur banjo volontairement relâché, leur violoncelle qui improvise, leurs riches harmonies vocales qui peuvent se faire dramatiques, leur semblant de danse à claquette et même leur gazou, les Tireux sont facilement reconnaissables entre mille. Pourtant, l'importance de la parole est également l'un des traits dominants de la signature de ce groupe qui donne autant dans la chanson festive que dans les mots à portée sociale.

«J'ai fait beaucoup de collecte et je possède un large répertoire de chansons», raconte Denis. «Mais les groupes et les chanteurs traditionnels sont plus nombreux qu'avant et il devient plus difficile de trouver des trésors qui n'ont pas été enregistrés par d'autres. Alors, on compose à partir

des thèmes de la tradition et les gens qui ne connaissent pas beaucoup le milieu ne sauront pas si les pièces sont anciennes ou pas». Certains textes portent sur des sujets intemporels comme la guerre et le recyclage. D'autres s'inspirent du vécu. C'est le cas d'Hommage à la Bol...duc ou de Ti-Fo Bouteille qui raconte l'histoire d'un homme qui ramasse les bouteilles. «C'était un personnage de notre enfance. On en avait tous un peu peur, mais on l'écoeurait quand on était en gang» rigole Denis.

Lorsque les Tireux ont commencé, leur répertoire comptait plus de contes que de chansons et le célèbre Fred Pellerin, de Saint-Élie-de-Caxton lui aussi, se produisait avec eux. Lors de leurs premières prestations, ils faisaient des recherches, montaient des numéros en fonction des villages visités, étudiaient le bottin téléphonique pour trouver les noms de famille des habitants de l'endroit et prenaient les présences au début des concerts...

Depuis lors, la musique a pris plus d'importance dans le répertoire et les contes sont devenus plus courts. «C'est à cause de la demande, mais nous avons toujours tenu à avoir quelque chose à dire. À la longue de plus en plus de nos chansons racontent des histoires et les contes sont de plus en plus reliés aux chansons. Cela s'est fait de façon progressive et inconsciente» poursuit le chanteur chercheur. Malgré cela, on trouve un conte caché avant le début de la première pièce sur Cé qu'essé.

Tout au long du parcours, la langue québécoise est bien affirmée. Dans le texte qui accompagne Hommage à la Bol...duc, Denis écrit: «Je vous dis tant que j'vivrai, j'dirai toujours moé pis toé. Je parle comme dans l'ancien temps. J'ai pas honte de mes vieux parents». En entrevue, il élaboré le plaidoyer: «Notre différence, il faut l'assumer, avec notre langue, nos accents et nos expressions. C'est un peu ce qui fait notre succès lorsque nous jouons en Europe. Pendant nos spectacles, ça devient un jeu. Les gens réagissent parfois à un mot et les concerts se meublent avec le chemin que nous faisons».

Et du chemin, ils en font. La France en mai dernier, retour prochain pour une plus grosse tournée, sans compter la réalisation d'un vœux : jouer davantage au Québec durant l'été. Au moment d'aller sous presse, il était même question de la grande scène

de la Saint-Jean au Parc Maisonneuve à Montréal et d'autres bonnes vitrines comme le Mariposa. Pour les besoins de la route, les Tireux viennent d'ajouter le contrebassiste Sébastien Saleciti à leur formation. «On voulait grossir le son pour les grandes scènes», raconte Denis. Mais contrebasse ou pas, le groupe ne pourra cacher la sensibilité de ses arrangements.

Une affaire de famille

Le dernier album de Martha Wainwright, enregistré devant public, évoque littéralement l'esprit d'Edith Piaf. Son projet actuel comprend des reprises de chansons de Kate et de Anna McGarrigle, qu'elle interprète accompagnée de son frère Rufus. Tony Montague prête l'oreille.

Ce fut une année difficile pour Martha Wainwright. En septembre, la parolière donna naissance à un fils prématuré de deux mois dans l'anxiété la plus totale. En janvier, sa mère, Kate McGarrigle, l'une des plus grandes icônes du folk canadien est morte du cancer. Wainwright est encore secouée par la perte de sa mère, mais la réalité des

couches à changer l'aide à gérer sa souffrance et à détourner son attention alors qu'une nouvelle vie commence pour elle.

Les chansons prennent forme, mais les émotions sont encore un peu trop fraîches pour être approchées. «J'ai atterri sur une autre planète : je suis propriétaire d'une nouvelle maison, je suis devenue mère, mais je n'ai plus de mère», explique Wainwright, rejointe à son domicile à Brooklyn, N.Y. «À chaque fois que je prends ma guitare, je finis en larme alors je vais attendre un peu avant d'écrire. Parce que mes chansons sont généralement très personnelles, je ne veux pas arriver avec trop de chansons larmoyantes. J'attends ma métaphore».

Ce qui ne fait pas de Wainwright une musicienne en pause. L'année dernière, suivant la suggestion du producteur Hal Willner, elle enregistra devant public un album de chansons françaises de la légendaire Édith Piaf (1915-1963) portant le long titre de Sans fusils ni souliers à Paris : Martha Wainwright's Piaf Record, paru au Canada en avril.

«Piaf est probablement la chanteuse préférée de mon enfance», raconte Wainwright, qui a grandi à Québec et parlait français à l'école. «L'idée de faire un enregistrement de ses chansons m'intimidait. Hal m'a envoyé plus de 200 chansons d'elle. Je ne peux pas dire que j'ai passé au travers de toutes les chansons, mais j'en ai découvert plusieurs qui méritaient d'être entendues. Ainsi, beaucoup des chansons présentes sur



Le Quartier Français

l'album ne sont pas si connues.

«Non seulement est-ce un hommage à Piaf, mais aussi à ceux qui écrivaient ses chansons et au genre de musique qu'elle affectionnait. Même si elle nous a quitté jeune, elle a commencé à chanter jeune, ce qui fait qu'elle a travaillé pendant une longue période. Son chant traverse diverses décennies et cela s'entend.»

Willner proposa à Wainwright de faire quelques spectacles à New York pour essayer certaines choses. Les prestations réussirent à communiquer l'esprit des chansons, des chansons de rue en langue étrangère (le français). De la même manière, même lors de l'enregistrement en studio, Piaf ne chantait probablement ses chansons qu'une seule fois.

Les concerts convainquirent Wainwright d'enregistrer l'album devant public, pendant trois spectacles à New York. «Cela a permis à l'album d'être un peu plus brut. Dans le fond, c'est la spontanéité et l'âme de la chanson qui prime plutôt que la meilleure voix ou etc.

«Je portais un petit costume parce qu'on filmait. Je n'ai jamais eu l'intention de jouer le rôle de Piaf comme le ferait une actrice et je n'ai pas fait de recherche sur sa vie. Je connaissais seulement les chansons et je les ai attaquées en tant que chanteuse plutôt qu'interprète. Toutefois, malgré mes efforts pour me séparer du personnage, dès que je commençais à chanter, particulièrement devant public, sa présence se manifestait d'une façon ou d'une autre, tel un esprit dans la pièce.

«J'ai toujours senti qu'elle écoutait et qu'elle écoute, et en gros, je réalise que toute l'affaire a été une tentative totalement intéressée de me lier à Edith Piaf, d'une manière ou d'une autre», dit Wainwright en riant. «C'est une sorte de rêve devenu réalité, ou peut-être un rêve surréaliste devenu vrai.»

Ces temps-ci, Wainwright travaille sur un projet de famille très spécial. «Je note certaines chansons de ma mère qui n'ont jamais été enregistrées. Ce ne serait pas pour un album de mon cru. Cela fait des années que nous parlons mon frère (Rufus Wainwright) et moi de faire un album de chansons de Kate et Anna (McGarrigle), chantées par différents artistes, dont nous.

«Alors c'est gros», continue Wainwright. «J'ai aussi participé à l'écriture d'un film

documentaire, *No Woman, No Cry*, par Christy Turlington (Burns), une mannequin célèbre dans les années 90, qui portait sur les femmes qui meurent de l'accouchement ou qui pourraient en mourir, partout dans le monde, parce que, dans beaucoup de sociétés dirigées par des hommes, il est socialement acceptable de se sacrifier. Le film portait aussi sur l'importance de faire en sorte que les sage-femmes sachent comment faire une césarienne, ou la promotion d'un avortement légal dans certains cas. Ce genre de truc très intense».

Wainwright est aussi de retour sur la route. En mars, elle a joué à Vancouver en programme double avec l'auteure-compositrice-violoncelliste de Québec, Jorane. C'était un spectacle solo, comprenant quelques chansons de sa mère ou de son père, Loudon Wainwright III, un homme à l'humour vif et caustique. Cependant, la plupart des chansons provenaient de son premier album éponyme (2005) et du suivant, *I Know You're Married But I've Got Feelings Too*, comme *Bleeding All Over You*, *You Cheated Me*, et son classique *Bloody Mother Fucking Asshole* (inspiré par Loudon).

«En général, j'ai remarqué que la meilleure manière de faire les choses était d'avoir une seule personne, accompagnée d'une guitare acoustique. Même si on veut intégrer tous les éléments de la production, et ça peut être plaisant, et les bons moments de jam, je trouve que le solo permet une meilleure communication avec le public et permet de voir la chanson pour ce qu'elle est».

La chose la plus importante que la mère de Wainwright lui ait enseignée en tant qu'auteure-compositrice? «J'imagine que la chose dont j'espère tirer le plus profit est toute la recherche qu'elle a fait, et son intérêt pour l'histoire et les gens».

«Mes chansons ont souvent tendance à être trop personnelles et trop émoticées, ce qui est bien correct, mais j'ai toujours envie l'habileté de ma mère de communiquer ses propres opinions à l'aide d'images et d'événements historiques; c'était une lectrice avide, plus qu'une pseudo-intellectuelle. Alors j'espérais qu'elle se glisserait à l'intérieur de moi et qu'elle essaiera de m'insuffler la même curiosité qu'elle a eue pour l'histoire au cours de sa vie. Je n'ai jamais été aussi intelligente qu'elle. C'est quelque chose que j'essaie d'assumer».

Xarnege

ixo*sho (Collectif Pyrène)

Il y a plus de peuples et de cultures en Europe que jamais! Xarnege (ça ressemble à «carnage», mais avec un X... encore plus cool!) se prononce en fait char-NAIG-é et le titre de l'album, *ixo*sho*, se traduit par «Tais-toi et écoute!». Leur musique tire ses origines anciennes de la Gascogne, dans le sud-ouest de la France, et du Pays basque, au nord-est de l'Espagne.

Ces deux régions, divisées (ou plutôt unies) par les Pyrénées, partagent une culture commune et Xarnege se donne pour but de faire entrer cette culture dans le monde moderne. Les membres du groupe viennent des deux côtés de la chaîne de montagne et apportent avec eux une longue expérience des traditions spécifiques aux deux régions.

Le terme multi-instrumental ne fut jamais si adéquat. Passés maîtres dans l'art de la boha, de la flabuta, de la chiroula et du ttun-ttun, dont les noms en soi retentissent d'exotisme ésotérique, ils allient le son de ces instruments à celui de la cornemuse, du violon et du bouzouki, créant une musique apparentée aux chansons folk celtes et scandinaves.

Les solos d'instruments à cordes sont joués avec attitude et intensité et la vielle a un son quasi heavy metal. Même si les paroles m'ont échappé, je peux vous jurer que j'ai rencontré les monstres, les meurtriers et les amoureux que ces ballades évoquent.

L'ensemble de la production est génial et le gros plan noir et blanc de la vielle à roue sur la pochette (style artiste bohème) nous indiquent que nous n'avons pas affaire à un groupe provenant du fond des bois. Je serais curieux de savoir combien de personnes sont capables de lire les textes sur la pochette, qui, à l'exception d'un paragraphe, sont écrits exclusivement en basque et en gascon.

– Par Lark Clark



La clog des Montagnards

trad

medium tempo swing A

Violin

5
10
15

B

Voilà deux pièces apprises du répertoire du groupe *sans âge*. Cette formation réunie des anciens membres du groupe *Les montagnards Laurentiens*. Cette formation, légendaire de son propre temps, avait une émission de radio hebdomadaire diffusé dans la région de Québec. Je propose ici 2 airs que vous auriez pu entendre en ouvrant la radio au milieu du XXe siècle.

Here are two melodies I learned from *Le groupe sans âge*. They include musicians from the '50s band *Les Montagnards Laurentiens* - famous for their weekly radio shows broadcast throughout most of Québec. You might have heard these two tunes on your radio in Québec City 60 years ago.

Le reel sans âge

trad

style galope A

19

27

B

36
42
48

Pascal Gemme



MICHAEL FRANTI & SPEARHEAD

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Songs of the Bush

Chloe & Jason Roweth

Voice

G G/B Em7 Cmaj7 G
Gran-dad - knew - sto - ries and songs of this count-ry from days be fore

C Am Am add 2 Am Am add 2 G Am
T. V. when gold was still ____ found ____ and the tunes that he played had a

G/B Cmaj7 G D/F# Em7
sound all Aust - ra ... lian, flow-ing as end-less as a spring from the ground. —

G G/B Em7 Cmaj7 G
— There in the gold-fields were all kinds of peo-ple, ma-ny who

C Am Am add 2 Am Am add 2 G Am
tra-veled so far from their ____ home, ____ so Gran-dad knew Ger-mans and

G/B Cmaj7 G D/F# Em7
Koo-ris and I - rish, shared with them mu-sic and sto-ries and ____ poems. —

D D add 6 C G
But I ne - ver learned ... how to play con-cer - ti - na, hap-py e -

D C G D D add 6
no-rough with my foot keep - ing ... time, ____ and some-where I guess I just

C G D Em7 C
took it for grant - ed, the songs of the bush would still be there next time. —

This country was growing, it's character showing
We're tough dancing drinkers always good for a laugh.
And the songs we were singing were no longer
homesick
Of bushrangers, shearing and this country we love.

But I never...

Strange days indeed when the songs of our history
Need be collected all over again.
But the old people die, taking with them their
memories.
And the melodies vanish like they've never been.

And I never...

"This song is our 'thank you' to the many collectors of Australian music and folk-lore." — Chloe and Jason Roweth. It can be found on their wonderful live recording, *One Man's Weeds Another Man's Flowers*.



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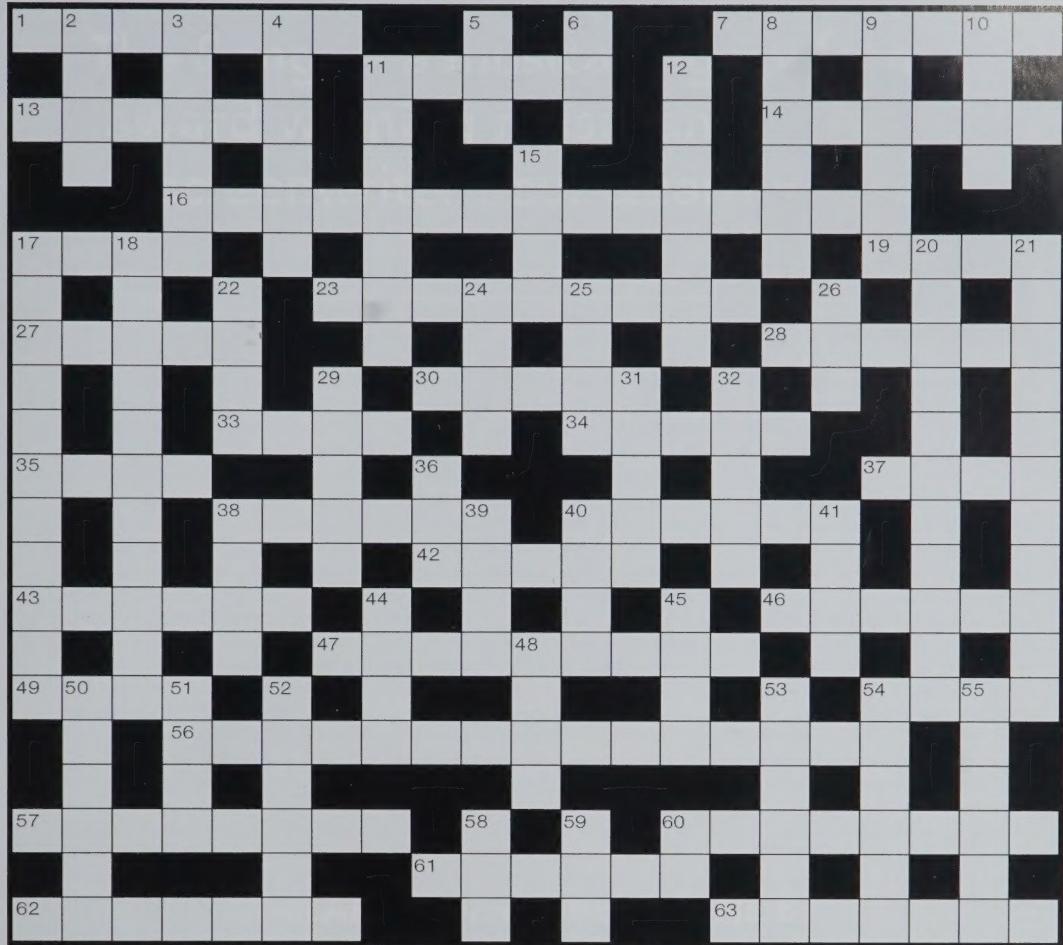


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PUZZLE BY CYGNET SOLUTIONS

Across

- i. Peter, Peggy, Mike, et al. (7)
7. Music merchandise (7)
- ii. Of sound (5)
13. Start anew (6)
14. Church singing (6)
16. Canadian — — (4,5,6)
17. Lively dances (4)
19. New Mexico town (4)
23. La Bottine — (9)
27. Motown label (5)
28. Oracle hotspot (6)
30. Subdued (5)
33. — and the Belmonts (4)
34. Ian — (5)
35. Lone wolf (4)
37. Bono's pal (4)
38. Picturesque (6)
40. Zubot and — (6)

42. Talk host — O'Brien (5)
 43. Prairie — (6)
 46. U.S. brewing giant (6)
 47. Fiddler Natalie — (9)
 49. — Thing You Do (4)
 54. Long book (4)
 56. — Crow — (3,8,4)
 57. PE managing editor Annemarie — (8)
 60. PE editor Roddy — (8)
 61. — O'Connor (6)
 62. Weather map lines (7)
 63. One-piece suit (7)
- Down
2. Garden of — (4)
 3. Muldaur, Berney, et al. (6)
 4. — "Rayguns" (6)
 5. — DiFranco (3)
 6. High card (3)

8. Stan or Garnet or Nathan (6)
 9. Cease and — (6)
 10. Guitar pioneer — Atkins (4)
 11. Tannis — (7)
 12. Major label executives (7)
 15. Electronic interface (abbrev.) (4)
 17. Ramblin' — (4,7)
 18. Fantastic large ocean (5,3,3)
 20. — Yaya — (5,6)
 21. Buffy — — (6,5)
 22. Pre-owned gear (4)
 24. — Coolidge (4)
 25. — prop (4)
 26. — Kortke (3)
 29. Leonard — (5)
 31. Bob — (5)
 32. What chickens do at night (5)
 36. As written (3)
 38. Wise one (4)
39. Actor — Feore
 40. Hicks, Hill, et al. (4)
 41. — Young (4)
 44. Neko — (4)
 45. MacLellan (4)
 48. Folkways pioneer Moses — (4)
 50. Homo sapiens (6)
 51. — Garrett (4)
 52. Magazine boss (6)
 53. Spirit guide (6)
 54. John Wort Hannam's — Suit (3,3)
 55. Classical composer (6)
 58. Roy Forbes (3)
 59. Sures or Harper (3)
 60. Music format (2)

All answers can be found at www.pinguineggs.ab.ca

The Opinion Page



Stephen Fearing

Stephen Fearing takes umbrage over a Penguin Eggs opinion piece and defends the merits of contemporary songs and their place at folk festivals.

"What is folk music?" It is a question I have avoided for most of my professional life. Perhaps Louis Armstrong had it right when he said, "All music is folk music; I've never heard a horse sing a song".

Folk music, roots music, world music: all these terms say more about the person using them than they do about the sounds they purport to describe or label. Music is fluid and changes subtly or instantly with every person who plays it. Labels are crude thumbnails often created by academics who like to examine their subjects like specimens under glass, or by marketers who want to freeze music long enough to shrink wrap it and sell it to you in the latest format. I believe that the term folk music is an old leaky vessel that sinks under the weight of its cargo.

Two issues ago, *Penguin Eggs* featured an opinion piece by the acclaimed singer, songwriter and morris dancer Ian Robb. The piece was a pointed and seemingly contemptuous argument in favour of more "singable and accessible folksongs rather than original material unconnected to any tradition."

Mr. Robb went to some length to criticize "singers who write their own songs, primarily for their own use in performance, with little realistic expectation or even aspiration that they will sing socially." He continues in a similar tone, referring to what he calls "capital A Art" and a "professional conceit" where songwriters "monetize" their songs and choose to only sing their own repertoire.

OK, I'll admit that I read the article, and as the saying goes, I resembled that remark. I am, after all, a singer and a songwriter who has successfully and unapologetically made his living

for the last 20-odd years by writing and performing material that is arguably unconnected or only loosely connected to any tradition (other than the ancient tradition of songwriting itself, of course). So after re-reading the article with mounting irritation, I felt compelled to reply.

The first sentence that really got my goat went as follows: "A song's success should be measured primarily by the number of people moved to sing it." No matter how many times I read that it still seems like nonsense. To suggest that a song is only successful if sung by many voices is to ignore half of the equation of music itself, the listeners' half.

Mr. Robb seems to have missed the point that we can be moved to tears or laughter, to deep contemplation or to simply get up and dance without feeling the slightest compulsion to participate by singing along at all. I've spent my life singing, on my own and with others, both formally and informally, in kitchens, clubs and choir stalls, on the mainstage and in the workshop tent. The experience of singing and playing with others or alone at the microphone is equally precious to me and I will continue to do both for as long as I am able.

However, if for some reason I am unable to continue performing, I will take solace in the art of listening. I love music in all its forms and I find little to compare to the experience of sitting in the balcony of a concert hall, or on a blanket under the stars, listening to the sound of somebody's beautiful visions pouring off the stage and into the darkness.

This brings me to another of Mr. Robb's pet peeves, which he describes as the "pitiful" state of contemporary Canadian folk festivals, where there are "fewer opportunities for audiences to sing, formally or informally ... than there are at a Maple Leafs game." Does anybody else find this statement inaccurate and more than a little pompous? I suppose that there might be some truth in it if one's only passion was singing along to *The Good Old Hockey Game* (indeed a great song), but the idea that the average festival sinks or swims on the quality of its singalongs is preposterous.

Most people would agree that a festival is a weekend well spent for a variety of reasons, and not just musical ones. However if singing along or jamming is your thing, then you could do a lot worse than attend, say, the Winnipeg Folk Festival, where if you're not able to lend your voice to a chorus or two at a workshop stage then just sit yourself down around a post-mainstage campfire, where you'll find like-minded souls who want to sing and jam

until dawn. The only thing you are likely to do after a Leafs game is drown your sorrows at the local knuckle and chuckle.

Part of Mr. Robbs blind spot is his use of the F word. Most so-called "folk" festivals encompass such a wide variety of music that, by and large, the term is meaningless. Comparisons with British folk festivals such as Whitby are also meaningless since the British definition of folk is as different from the Canadian definition as the music circuits and the festivals themselves.

Mr. Robb centres his point of view almost exclusively around the English language and folk experience as defined by the culture that originated in the British Isles somewhere in the last 200 years. This would make it difficult to sing along to Ladysmith Black Mombazo or La Boutine Souriant, the Whitefish Bay Singers, Pacific Curls or any other non-British Isles tradition appearing on the average Canuck stage.

Pointing the finger at festivals and at that old whipping boy the singer-songwriter ignores the fact that the solo singer-songwriter's day as mainstage mainstay is largely over. What I do see appearing on most festival radars is young performers and bands who openly embrace many different genres and traditions, often at the same time (The Duhks, Sheesham and Lotus, Little Miss Higgins, etc.).

The lines are blurring and the music rolling off the stages of your average Canadian folk fest is likely to be as eclectic as hitting shuffle on your iPod (no coincidence there). Like the music itself, the Canadian folk scene is healthy and changing rapidly as amateurs and professionals alike continue to grow and embrace new music and ideas.

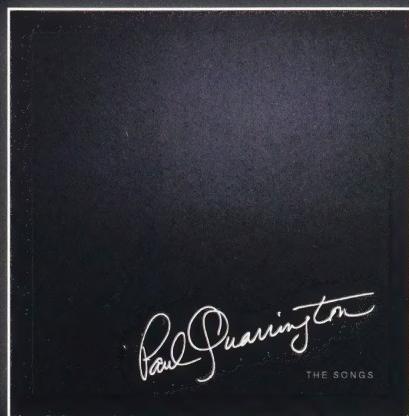
Those of us who have been around understand that the process was underway well before Bob Dylan shed the Woody Guthrie act, before Fairport Convention began looking in their own backyard, before Sam Cooke left the Soul Stirrers and Carole King left the Brill Building. This transformation was underway long before Bruce Cockburn left Berkeley for Yorkville and Paul Simon coppered *Scarborough Fair* from Martin Carthy. Even before Alan Lomax had tea with A.L. (Bert) Lloyd and Ewan MacColl, the music was living and breathing and evolving.

I doubt that this will stop anytime soon, so fear not, Mr. Robb, the sky is not falling. And if, as you say, "we stand to lose the folk scene as we have known it", that's only because something new and vital has come along to replace it ... again.

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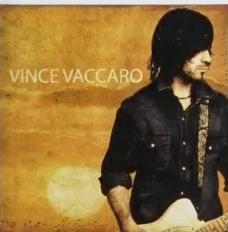
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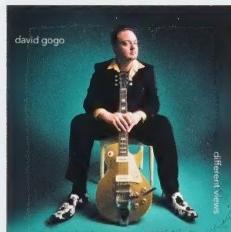
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